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# F A T A L E

By Dan Scaferrotti

● **KILLER INSTINCT**, a horror film officiated by veteran producer Terry O'Neil (TOOLBOX MURDERS), just wrapped in Pennsylvania. The cast includes Dee Wallace Stone (whose late husband, Christopher Stone, wrote the script) and Corbin Bernsen (THE DENTIST I & II).

The story: Wendy, a little girl adrift in the woods, witnesses a lynching. Flash forward to years to four couples—yes, an odd-numbered Wendy is among them—who volunteer to spend the night in an abandoned psycho asylum. Chaos ensues: "We have this great old mansion in Watchwater," said O'Neil. "In the film, they play this game and every one is all over the place. One guy is missing and they find his body. Suddenly, they realize they're trapped. They can't get out of the place because there are bars on the windows." It turns out that the board of directors of a meat packing plant, the town's central industry, were the conspirators behind yesteryear's vigilante violence, and it's their offspring who are trapped in the asylum! "It's a good little horror script with some interesting killings and some sex," said DeLo. "We brought Paige Moss in from Los Angeles to play Wendy. She's a tiny little thing but a dynamic actress."

The film prepped FP's reunion with gorgeous porno goddess Dee Wallace Stone (GUD, CRITTERS, E.T., THE HOWLING), whom we initially interviewed back in 1992 (issue 1.4). "The producers asked me to do the part that my late husband wrote for me," said Wallace. "I play Sarah, who's not a real bad



Posing for FP playing Wendy. "Carnal" Mizz, delicious Dee Wallace Stone denies her character has a KILLER INSTINCT (that she doesn't have a lot of ethics & morals!)

guy but she doesn't have a lot of ethics or morals. She's working for a company that wants to come in and take over the town. They don't intend for anything or anyone to get in their way, and it doesn't matter if they have to put people out of work or lie and all that kind of good stuff. Sarah gets in over her head by uncovering a lot of stuff, including murders and a lot of the dark secrets of the town that happened a long time ago. There's a lovely little suspense at the end, but I'm not going to give it away. Wendy's story and my story sort of parallel each other and finally come in and intersect at the end. She looks like my character into finding out how to really

naïve the town."

● Listen-up! A daily conclave of sex-fi fiends are converging at the Forbidden Planet (840 Broadway, New York, New York). The first all-galaxy event is scheduled for September 20th, and as less than four females will be in attendance...

● **Joanne Michaels**, currently modeling as Lani Croft for a comic book illustrated by Joe Jusko

● **Steve E. Walker**, who's modeled for Bora Velez, Julia Bell and the Brothers Hildstrand.

● **Marne Kelley**, the sexy Canadian beauty who posed as Vanessa for Holly Gidley

● **Countess Wedmire**, whose own comic book is published by Pelegrie Entertainment.

Forthcoming guests will include **Brink Stevens** (November 1st), in addition to other actresses/modelfemale writers who are indelibly linked to sci/fantasy. If you're warm, hang with the females ladies, shop at Forbidden Planet, the #1 retailer of sci-fi film collectibles. For further details, call 212-473-6161.

● **Juliette Lewis** (FROM DUSK TILL DAWN, NATURAL BORN KILLERS) occupies THE FOURTH FLOOR (a thriller by director Josh Klausner that debuted on video and DVD [A-Pix Entertainment]) inheriting her aunt's brownstone apartment. Lewis' heroine is imperiled by warning notes slipped under her door and pounding from the apart-

ment below. Chaos ensues. Lewis' boyfriend is played by Willem Hurt, whose character—Greg Harrison, a local TV celebrity—incarnates the ego of his BROADCAST NEWS anchorman, Tom Grunick. (I have a theory that Grunick is skunking behind a Harrison pseudonym. Maybe Grunick's corruption has denoted him to a regional gig as Harrison's TV weatherman who, in a comball dip locked to the credit snail of his show, makes a *Fearless* pact with Satan—rekindling Grunick's sale of his soul to trendy cosmetic journalism.)

But has Harrison/Grunick sunk into psychosis? You tell me. The "twist" ending is completely inexplicable, even the "erotic scenes," accessible on DVD, add no credibility to this not having. Anyway, Shelley Long co-stars as "Marta Stewart." You believe?

● As the producers apply finishing touches to **HEAVY METAL 3** (FA K&K, like **HEAVY METAL 2000**), Moore creates a physically replicating the film's characters—including Tyler, Zeek and Julie Spain's animated after-ego, FA K&K 2—into 6" action figures. The company's honcho, Clayburn Moore, has transformed licensing into a personal venue for objects d'art: his sculpted renderings of Vanessa, Xena and Witchblade's Sara Pezzini being in living rooms, not garages. "The idea of working with Kevin Soriano, and using Soriano Bailey's paintings of Julie Spain as subject matter, seemed to be a tiny line opportunity I couldn't pass up," said Moore. "I met with Julie and Kevin's company. They're been very generous and helpful in providing reference material."

"Each case will have a Julie 'variant' theme figure to help market cases," Moore continued. "Then there will also be an 'exclusive Julie,' which will be marketed by Diamond Distribution. Diamond's is very good about publicity on their releases, which helps make buyers aware of the regular figures. In our case figures and exclusives, we always try to offer something new and varied which is only in that variant. The theme figure has original weapons, a Zeek figure and a different paint job. The Diamond 'exclusive Julie' has different weapons again, a little Zeek figure and a new paint scheme. Unless we're doing a cowritten spe-



Juliette Lewis & Willem Hurt try to control the heat (i.e. dank) ending of THE 4TH FLOOR. It's not exactly THE 4TH SENSE, in retrospect, it makes no sense

oval figure, we try not to release more than the regular figure and two variations of any female figure.

"A figure can take as little as 50 hours sculpting time, but Julie has a great amount of detail so she took about 130 hours."

● **Brandi Roderick**, Playboy's April 2000 Playmate, will spice-up **BAYWATCH HAWAII** as tempest lead, Leigh Dyer. The starlet, who hails from northern California, had formerly functioned as eye candy in a **BABYLON FIVE** episode, Dr Pepper commercials and three films released in '98 (including **CLUB WILDSIDE 2** with Monique Parent). One of Roderick's goals is to be a more demonstrative presence in horror films.

● **New Hampshire** filmmaker Brett Piper, whose cult saga, **THEY RISE**, qualified for an early **FF** cover story (2/1), is back with **DRAINAGE**, an engaging, low-budget hybrid of Gummy and the Grand Guignol. It's all about a group of teens who congregate in a house that's saddled with leaky plumbing—it seems the pipes are clogged with water nymphs and demons (think of **THE H-MAN** transplanted to New England). "Leslie Culton, who's made minor horror films and was a Bettie Page look-alike on **LIFESTYLES OF THE RICH AND FAMOUS**, has a cameo," said Piper. "Leslie does this weird, surreal naked dance under the end credit."

The film's genesis and title were influenced by an image that haunted Piper, which he finally shot as **DRAINAGE**'s dream sequence: "There's a girl in the bathtub, and something comes out of the drain and sucks her down. The unlucky girl is played by the film's lead actress, Georgia Hulse."

The aforementioned Ms. Culton enjoys more visibility in the comic book medium. Embodying **Lady Death**, she posed for cover artist David Beck. "I was assigned to the **Dark Millennium** miniseries, which premiered last spring," says Culton. "Being a long time comic book fan, posing as **Lady Death** for **Chaos! Comics** was a dream-come-true for me. Artist Brian Pulido has always portrayed **The Lady** as a strong but undeniably erotic character. She knows what she wants and she just takes it!"

● **Last year**, Ten Byrme—one of the **Nitro Girls**—briefly abandoned the live-action wrestling milieu to reprise her "Fyre" alter ego in **READY TO RUMBLE**, a film about



Adrienne McGheave is a she-devil who lousies-up plumbing in **DRAINAGE**, directed by Brett Piper (**THEY RISE**). Co-player Leslie Culton, cast as a topless water nymph who dances in the credit crawl, posed for **Chaos! Comics** as "Lady Death."

the misadventures of ringside eddies Ron McGowan and David Arquette. But now, reaffirms Byrme, the Fyre is permanently out. "Being a **Nitro Girl** was one of the high points of my life, and one of the most memorable experiences I have ever had," she noted. "I am one of the few people who have been able to live their dream, and experience traveling, performing live and meeting celebrities on a regular basis. What was even more incredible was that I didn't fall into

drugs, alcohol, adultery and the other lies that often thrive in the entertainment world. I found out how strong I really am. I have remained steadfast and true to myself and the name Fyre suddenly meant more to me than having red hair and a great body. Leaving **Nitro** was a sad relief. I felt it coming for weeks and when it finally did, I breathed a big sigh of relief. Although I miss my friends there, I surprisingly don't miss the lifestyle. After a few weeks at home, away from the road—and

the airports and the craziness—I felt like me again, only wiser."

Byrme is now busy developing her own franchise and a website [www.TenByrme.com](http://www.TenByrme.com).

● **Stacy S. Walker**, the preferred pinup model of fantasy artists, has just recovered from a three month battle with the pneumonia bug. Her poses for three celebrated illustrators—Donna Cleaveinger, David Nestler and Monte Moore—were recently featured in a spread tailored for **Heavy Metal** magazine.

Walker will soon be back to work with Greg Hildebrand on a new series: "It's titled *The Great American Pinup*," explains the model. "I'm very excited about doing the classics. It's brushstrokes stuff." Greg's doing his first pinups and they're all based on film noir. "The first stop for the paintings will be a New York gallery show before pricing the pages of a calendar."

Walker is also "tinkering with erotic, fishy tales that may transfer into fully illustrated graphic novels." In the meantime, she's teamed up with writer Haley Elia-both Garwood for a series of books based upon the exploits of warrior queens. "Haley is planning on nine of them, three are out already, *The Forgotten Queen*, *Swords Across the Thrones* and *Ashes of Babylon*," said Walker. "Alex Haley is doing the illustrations. It's about all these incredibly strong women from history who basically have been forgotten. We're going to bring them back to the forefront."

Tap into [www.alacynwalker.com](http://www.alacynwalker.com) for Walker's modified website: the "Members Only" installment includes her personal journal, a revealing photo gallery and sassy merchandise.

● **Feminist filmmaker Jacquelyn Rutlier** is in post production on *THE THIRD SOCIETY*. Wearing quadruple hats (producer/director/writer), Rutlier stars in the film as Jones, a police officer whose sister is abducted by the Asian Mafia, a quarter of a century ago, the criminal organization's assassins murdered the siblings' parents. "Jones only has 24 hours to rescue her sister," explained Rutlier. "Jones is a type of ninjas cop, and it's unclear whether she's really an L.A. law officer or if she's posing as a police officer on request from the Federal Government. It's intentionally blurred in the story. The film is more of a characterization of Jones and why she's a cop...and why her personality is so on the edge."

Rutlier, who trains in Muay Thai kick boxing, had speculated on shooting scenes in Thailand. "But location shooting there would've been too complicated. So I opted for the lush rain forests and beaches of Queensland. I flew myself to Australia and picked up a cameraman and camera assistant there. I shot for one day and 15 minutes 17 minutes of that footage made it into the final edit." Tap into [www.warrentertainment.com](http://www.warrentertainment.com)

● **Sci-fi zeez Louise Hutter** once again tries the dark, this time in *SACRIFICE*, a dark thriller directed



Jacquelyn Rutlier parades *THE THIRD SOCIETY*. The professor/director/writer is "now working on *VERTIGO*, an all-female hybrid of *HIGHLANDER* and *BLOODSPORT*."

by Mark Lester (*CLASS OF 1999*). "Cast as a top, my throat is slashed," noted Hutter. "It happens while I'm investigating something—which I don't want to give away." The film, "about a serial killer," debuts on HBO. Hutter's genre credits include *DARK NOVA* (6/17) and *SPIDERS*.

● **Pam Wilson**, television's LA *FEMME NIKITA*, co-stars with Ellen Barkin in *MERCY*, an erotic thriller released by Columbia TriStar Home Video. The cast notwithstanding,

it's not very pretty: a serial killer seizes the eye lids of his victims. While investigating the case, homicide detective Catherine Palmer (Barkin) is drawn into a sadomasochistic environment she becomes acquainted with Vicki (Wilson), who practices lethally subversive sex scenarios and fraternizes with a dub of sexual predators (all female, of course). Wilson's fans will be either elated or outraged.

● **Lauree Wallace**, *Maxim*'s VP pres, supports Elizabeth Hurley in

**DOUBLE WHAMMY**. "I was cast as 'Caprice,' a fitness instructor who performs on a TV series called *FITNESS CHEER*," grinned Wallace. "We're shooting in New York." Thrasy is furnishing the cheerleader costumes.

● **Actress/model Lon Appell**, who recently played a Goth vampire on a *NASH BRIDGES* episode, offers some insight on her role in *THE VICTIM*, a "fearless thriller" directed by Jim Meyer. "My character, Audra Major, is a real sexy culting gold digger. She's really gutsy, she's hot. She's one of those girls you wouldn't want to get in your face." According to the scores, the JM Film Production involves "90 different characters who are hustling for a \$8 million inheritance. Their schemes include murder, sex—you name it, they'll do it. They'll do whatever they can to get the money."

Appell will soon be co-producing *TIME WARP*, a comic actioner. "I'll be playing Shelley, who's a very naive girl in that film...actually, there are a lot of sex scenes so she's not that naive." Appell, who shed her clothes for two short films, *THE SIN* and *REMOTE*, insists, "I have no problem with nudity. I think that every woman should be comfortable with her body."

● **The busy Julie Strain** checked in fresh from the set of *FREE RIDE*, a "ball-buster" about piped parasites. The supporting cast includes Massimo Masi, whom Strain describes as "an Oriental Bette Page," and Arben Dinean. The film offers a sanguinary slant on *RISKY BUSINESS*: college students, organizing a tuition fund raiser, has an ensemble of rando strippers. When the party is in full swing, the ladies bare their anuses—and their fangs. "The kids don't know we're vampires," said Strain. "We come in and just tear them to pieces. We end up killing everyone at the party. We drink all their blood. I actually take one of the young college boys, and throw him on a Harley Davidson, and drive off in to the sunset. They just liked the wrong girl."

Los Angeles locations were utilized for the shoot, and director Brian Spitz volunteered his own home for the party's interior scenes. "There is a lot of nudity," said Strain who snagged a producer credit on the film. "The stuff I wear at the party is completely sheer. Besides the fangs, a couple of the girls have contact lenses."

continued on page 49



Levi Appelt, posing for photos. Linda Virkons, played a vampire in the **NASH BRIDGES** series and a gold digger in **THE VICTIM**, the latter a "fantasy thriller"



Rebecca Rice (3, "The Oriental Bitch Page") & Julie Stuenkel are cast as vampires, who moonlight as strip-teasers, in **PT&E** **TRICK**. Stuenkel, who also produced, recalls "We end up drinking all the blood of a hot party"



# YANCY BUTLER WITCHBLADE

CAST IN A PROFUSION OF SCI-FI ROLES, THE JUICY GENRE ICON DISCUSSES HER TRANSFORMATION INTO THE COMIC BOOK BABE.

BY DAN SCAPPEROTTI

Since making her TV debut only one decade ago, Yancy Butler has played a robot, been imperiled by bio-chemical weapons and is currently embodying one of the comic book industry's most popular femmes fatales.

Butler's showbiz lineage includes Joe Butler, her dad and lead singer/drummer for the *Lovin' Spoonful*. And her mom was a theatrical manager on Broadway. Butler describes her childhood in Greenwich Village as "very quick. I haven't really been a kid since I was nine. It's a trip. You learn a lot very quickly but, as my mother said, I was given a lot of freedom because the quicker I could steer myself away from the crazies, the better. That's kind of like my philosophy. I just gave up my place in L.A. and I'm back home. I'm living in the place where my grandparents [both were theatre veterans] have lived."

Before officially declaring drama as a career, Butler made a pact with her parents. "The deal was that if I went to college and got my grades, I could do whatever I wanted." Enrolling at Sarah Lawrence College, she "mostly stud-



The Top Cow comic that spawned the movie *Witchblade* (88, drawn by Michael Tarras, inked by D-Torr). Merchandising tie-ins include a Christmas ornament!

ied English Lit, Anthropology and Child Psychology. My education at Sarah Lawrence actually did help in what I do now because I was interested in different people, different cultures and different ways of life and, I guess, that's what I'm doing now—storytelling. I just like being in the stories rather than seeking them up and learning about them. I kind of studied dramatics my whole life, so I decided for that amount of money not to do much theater at all in college. I did mostly academic. It was actually a guilt thing."

After graduation in 1990, Butler met producer Dick Wolf and launched her professional vocation playing an informant in the "Misconceptions" episode of *LAW & ORDER*. "I'll never forget something that happened on the set," she relates. "Coming from the theater, I didn't know what a stand-in was. I remember standing in between two very large men, Paul Sorvino and Chris Noth. I turned to Chris to say something and turned back to Paul, and realized it was someone dressed in Paul Sorvino's clothes who looked like him but wasn't him and I screamed loudly. That was the beginning of it all."





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**"MANN & MACHINE**  
was a great series.  
Eve is fantastic. To  
be chosen to play  
the most genetically  
perfect specimen/  
creation of our time  
was a trip in itself."

---

Two years later, Butler branched the sci-fi genre with **MANN AND MACHINE**. She was cast as a "mechanical woman" in the short-lived TV series, which premiered on April 5, 1992. Transpiring "in the very near future," the central story speculates that rudimentary robots will be integrated into the work

Yancy Butler, as N.Y. cop Sara Pezzini, is armed with the *Witchblade*. ("She's self-sufficient but she does not know how to use it.") **R.** One of Moore's Creators' *Witchblade* tie-ins





Butler as Eve Edison, an android, is in the short-lived series, **MANN AND MACHINE**. "We were up against **MURDER SHE WROTE** in its 2nd season...never had a chance in hell."

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**"I don't have an affinity for science fiction or fantasy, and I don't know why I'm cast in so many of these genre films... It just all sort of happened."**

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force. Detective Bobby Mann is underwhelmed with the technology until he's introduced to his new partner, Sgt. Eve Edison, an android posed for a field test. "I played the robot detective," smiled Butler. "That's another Dick Wolf production. That was a great series. Eve is fantastic. To be chosen to play the most genetically perfect specimen creation of our time was a trip in itself. She had the social relationships of a seven year old. She was very naive, she was constantly learning all the time. It was a really wonderful series that wasn't picked up, which was a shame. We were up against **MURDER SHE WROTE** in its second season and we never had a chance in hell. We did nine shows but I didn't know when it was on nor did anyone else. But it had a great premise."

Another series that unfortunately suffered from ceding Nielsen numbers was **SOUTH BEACH** (1993), which only ran for seven episodes. Butler was cast as Kate Patrick, a small-time con woman who only steals what she needs. When her brother's life is threatened, she compromises and allies with a crime-fighting team organized by a government operative; they're options are to dutifully stick to the regimen or risk a jail sentence. "It was like what they're doing now with **J.A. FEMME NIKITA**," explains Butler. "John Glover played this kind of antagonist and I have to work for him to get out of jail. That was a

good concept. Dick Wolf created that show with me in mind and it was an honor. We had some good people on that. I loved that character. God, she was balley. I think WITCHBLADE's Sara Pezzini is very similar to that character."

After his HBO success with *TALES FROM THE CRYPT*, producer Gil Adler created a new series for the cable network titled *PERVERSIONS OF SCIENCE*. Each segment was introduced by a computer-generated graphic called Chrome, a sort of surrogate Crypt Keeper. Butler appeared in the "Given the Heir" episode, which she describes as "Jungian in concept. I portrayed someone in the future that had come back as a woman who comes back as a man. I end up destroying both of us. It was basically a very strange but a very innovative adult series. They had described it to me as 'a science fiction version of *TALES FROM THE CRYPT*.' They only aired a few episodes."

Crossing over to feature films, Butler was cast in John Woo's *HARD TARGET*, the umpteenth adaptation of Richard Connell's *Most Dangerous Game*. She was subsequently cast in *DROP ZONE*, *LET IT BE ME* and *RAVAGER*, the latter a sci-fi saga about a spaceship's crew turning into the catalyst for a toxic infection. "I'm actually proud of that film," says Butler. "It's a little theoretical and intellectual in terms of its pace. That was about government-induced bio chemical warfare. It was pretty good for the amount of money we spent on it. Bruce Payne and Juliet Landau, Martin Landau's daughter, were also in it."

Released in 1999, *DOOMSDAY MAN* thematically linked Butler with another apocalyptic scenario. "That was an independent film. I did a couple of summers ago with James Marshall and Esai Morales," she notes



WITCHBLADE Butler discovers the secret of the artifact, which was worn by Joan of Arc. "Like the comic, it begins as a bracelet. By the end, it turns into a suit of armor."

"The film was basically about genetic warfare. The concept was to relate to AIDS, but it's more about a bacteria that can't be destroyed. It's a disease that is taking over the world and I play this head of a militaristic bio lab. I was a good guy. The director, Bill Greenblatt, was James Marshall's father."

"I don't have an affinity for science fiction or fantasy. I wasn't a huge L. Ron Hubbard reader or comic book reader, so I don't know why I'm in so many of those films. I'm not adverse to it at all, it just happened. Not only that, I don't have a thing for action pictures. They just seem to follow me where ever I go. No complaints here. It's lucrative and fun but, no, this is not something I sought out."

Earlier in life, Butler starred in *THIN AIR*, an A&E movie adapted from Robert B. Parker's *Spencer* novels (the character, a private investigator, was previously incarnated in a 1985 television series). "I did it because I adore Joe Mantegna, who played Spencer," reveals the actress. "And, just like WITCHBLADE, that movie was filmed in Toronto. I play Lisa St. Claire, a woman who gets kidnapped from her present husband by her ex-boyfriend."

Butler admits she was "intrigued" with the script for *WITCHBLADE*.

The story, Sara Pezzini, a New York City police detective, realizes that one of the consequences of an ancient artifact is its ability to evolve into a lethal weapon.

Reunited with director Ralph Hemecker, the actress was told that she was competing with other actresses for the Pezzini role. "I love Ralph," grins Butler. "He took something that really may not have come off as plausible and made it realistic. He took this vision and really shaped it into something wonderful. He's a treat to work with on a grueling schedule."

The movie is adapted from Top Cow's *Witchblade* comic book, which chronicles the contretemps of Kenneth Irons, a billionaire industrialist and respected member of the community. But Irons' civility is a facade, concealing a criminal alter ego whose primary goal is to control the Witchblade, an arcane artifact that wields unprecedented power. Frustrated in his attempts to manipulate the talisman, Irons discovers that the Witchblade not only has a mind of its own but will only delegate a woman as its heir. When the relic affixes itself to Sara Pezzini, Irons schemes to restrain the young police officer and exploit her authority over the Witchblade. Pezzini, however, has other plans.

"I was attracted to Sara's

vulnerability and yet her strength," exclaims Butler. "I play her in the vein of a genre femme fatale but a very realistic one, as opposed to the broadly portraying her in a very unrealistic situation. I think that what gives it credibility and what gives it life—and humor, whenever allowed and very much needed—is the realistic portrayal of how weird this Witchblade thing is. Sara has a duality to the way she reacts to different situations: and she doesn't always make the best decisions."

"It's very Taoistic. Sara doesn't know how to use it, she doesn't know what to do, she doesn't know what it is, she doesn't really remember how she got it on her wrist. So it's almost this burden for her in the beginning and, at some point, one would hope that she learns how to utilize it so it works for her. But it is, in fact, a nemesis unto itself. While this criminal, Galle, is the external kind of antagonist, this is very much related to your ego and id. This could be any of our evil forces until you turn them into good. If you don't know how to utilize them, the dark forces can

The heroine of the *Witchblade* comic book (L. #2) has encountered Lisa Cruz and Esai in special efforts.



**"I was attracted to the heroine's vulnerability and strength. I play her in the vein of a genre femme fatale but a realistic one: she doesn't make the best decisions."**

be very destructive."

Contrary to speculation among non-afficionados, *Witchblade* does not allude to a female character. "I'm just wearing the theme name," laughs Butler. "In the film, it begins as a bracelet which is similar to what it is in the comic. It's a bracelet with an oval eye shape that turns into a gauntlet. For the most part, when you see this thing in action, it is a gauntlet...except, toward the end, it turns into a full suit of armor. It has talons and jewels. It was quite elaborate; it was quite fun, but it was hard to wear. There was a lot of skin pinching, but they did a fantastic job to make it as comfortable as possible and as aesthetically pleasing as possible."

The film's Sara Pezzini character fraternizes with five men: there's the sociopathic/criminals lord Kenneth Irons and his right-hand man/hired assassin *fox Nottingham*. Pezzini's partner, Daniel Woo, is killed but continues to exist on another plane. Ex-surfie-turned-cop, *Jake McCarty*, is secretly in love with the heroine. Then there's Gallo, another killer with whom Pezzini has a score to settle.

"Because of the way that Ralph Henecker worked it, there's lots of sexual tension—even between Sara and Gallo," says Butler. "She's the forbidden fruit, I think, and that's the way they've treated her. The way Ralph explained it to me was that they reworked the theory of the Holy Grail. Without getting too intellec-



**WITCHBLADE** David Chokachi, cast as police officer Jake McCarty, is in love with Butler's heroine. "I think she is a loner. She's kind of the *Tomb Raider* girl."

tual about it, it's that people are protected by the bloodline of Christ. Nottingham, who's in cahoots with Irons, is protecting me and protecting the *Witchblade*, itself, so it can go back to its original owner. She feels more comfortable with Irons because she can rise to that level, and his disposition is less enigmatic, whereas Nottingham is just completely over the edge and Sara doesn't know what the hell he's doing around Gallo. He is a mobster and Sara has reason to believe that not only did he have something to do with the death of her father, but also her best friend about a week later. So revenge is written all over her face.

"Sara's very self-sufficient. I think she's a loner. Having sexual tension with a guy is certainly not exclusive to the other jobs I've had. When you're a chick in the boy's club, you have a tendency for that to happen. Think about the *Ted and Diane* houses in *CHEERS*, and how wonderfully that tension was executed, people were wondering who she'd sleep with. It's a natural hu-

man response. Unfortunately with this one, I have five guys so your guess is as good as mine—but we'll see I'd be happy with any of them right now."

*WITCHBLADE* has its share of pyrotechnical gags and, although action scenes are not Butler's "thing," she quickly learned to acclimate. "Tentatively at best is how I prepare for these sequences," she laughs. "We had a lot of them and I like to do my own stunts, without getting crazy. It was extremely physically challenging. You just ask as many questions as you have to when they think they're going to get it and what they need, then you stretch...You stretch, it's all you can do."

Butler routinely whips into her own exercise regimen (i.e. stretching and 45 minutes of cardiovascular, four times per week). "But *WITCHBLADE* was the first film that I've done that I've been too tired to work out. It would have been overkill. There is a gym sequence where I go to relieve the built-up tension, because I'm pissed off and I

want to let off steam when my best friend has died. We must have gone in and out of that shot a dozen times. I'm talking hitting a heavy bag, which I've never done, for probably four hours. There were breaks here and there, but it was physically rough. And so much fun."

When queried about professionally problematic situations, Butler volunteers "four challenges, starting with the *MANN AND MACHINE* series. That was my first major gig, and I had all these long lines of scientific jargon. I did a film called *LET IT BE ME* with Patrick Stewart, Jennifer Beals and Leslie Caron and that was challenging because I had to learn how to dance, which I never did before. For two months, six hours a day, all I did was dance. Considering I was working with Leslie, who I consider the ambassador of dance to this country, I was very nervous. An episode of *NYPD BLUE* was also a stretch...Playing a junkie is not easy."

"And *WITCHBLADE* also offered major challenges, just in terms of being physically demanding and not being stuck with a B-story. Having to be in every frame was a continuous momentum of energy and choice. There were different jobs and different reasons, but those would be my top four."

Between takes of the *WITCHBLADE* movie, Butler passed the time "by doing crossword puzzles. I would love to be able to paint but I can't. I used to read but I would get too involved with the book, and they'd call me for a scene. Crossword puzzles, you can pick up and put down. I tried needlepoint but that's gone by the wayside."

"For now, like everyone else, I'm very excited to see where *WITCHBLADE* ends up and what these adventures are going to be like. It's a great show, and something I've never really seen on television before." □

# WITCHBLADE COMIC BOOK BABE

**"IT'S A DRAMA, NOT 'BAYWATCH.'" CHRONICLING THE HEROINE'S CROSSOVER: FROM AGGRESSIVE ART TO A MOVIE'S CRUSADER.**

By Dan Scaferotti

Her franchise may turn into serious competition for the few and far between "superheroine" icons, including Wonder Woman and Xena. So, will **WITCHBLADE**, adapted into a TNT movie, be spun-off into a television series? The character has already cornered the market on merchandising tie-ins, with action figures, graphic novels and T-shirts.

Seven years ago, Marc Silvestri founded Top Cow which has expanded—right on the heels of Marvel and DC Comics—into the third largest supplier of comic books. Among the company's stable of commerce is *Spirit of the Doll*, *Rising Stars* and the upcoming *Aphrodite 5*. Chris Morgan is presently adapting Top Cow comic *The Darkness* into a screenplay for Columbia Pictures. Another company product, *Fathom*, has been pitched as a project for Fox.

Silvestri & Co. gauged the time was ripe for a Renaissance woman to be reintroduced into the medium. Beyond classic stalwarts such as Sue Storm, Sheena and Supergirl, the distaff side of the action genre has generally yielded disappointing crops. Along with David Wohl (President of Creative Affairs), Brian Haberlin and Michael Turner, Silvestri created the Sara Pezzini and Witchblade characters.



T: A Top Cow comic book rendering of Witchblade's Sara Pezzini. Notes comic creator, Marc Silvestri (35, "Sara is strong & well-rounded. If she were a criminal, she'd be unbreakable. But having a moral compass, she's a good person.")



Wohl had abandoned a prospective career as an entertainment lawyer when, as a high school student, he developed an internship at Marvel Comics. "When we set out to create a strong female character," he notes, "Brian Haberlin and I both really liked the fantasy concept of an eternal champion, and we both also liked the idea of a sentient weapon, kind of like Excalibur. Science fiction writer Michael Moorecock had written this fantasy saga about a sword called Stormbringer. It was a demon in a sword that had this mind of its own. It was evil and it used to suck out people's souls. The guy who wielded Stormbringer barely had control of it."

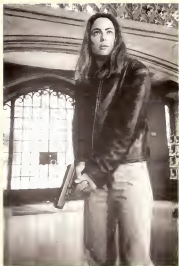
"In regard to *Witchblade*, we thought it would be really cool to take that sentient weapon, place it in modern day and give it to a strong female lead character set in a realistic story. Once we settled in on Sara Pezzini being a cop, we decided to take a cop story and keep all the realistic elements in it, but then throw in this totally fantastic element of the *Witchblade* that has a mind of its own. It's not evil, but it has its own agenda that the person who wields it isn't even aware of. We took the idea to Mark Silvestri and Michael Turner, the artist. We threw around different ideas fleshing out the character, like where she lives and looks like."

"This actually came out

before Xena did," adds Marc Silvestri. "We thought it was a great time to hit the market with a strong female lead, but base her in reality which kind of bucked the trend in comics. In fact, most of the things that we publish at Top Cow have a strong base in reality. We launch the elements of the fantastic from that so there is something there for everyone to relate to, whether you're into superheroes or not. We want to make that irrelevant. We wanted to make it something that people could pick up and read, and they could instantly identify with it. It's also much more intriguing when it's someone who is real, and exists in the real world, who is stuck with what really turns out to be a problem.

"In the case of *WITCH-BLADE*, it's be careful what you wish for because you may regret it. In Sara Pezzini's case, what does she do? She's real, she's a New York police detective. She's got bills to pay and she has to at least try to have a social life. She's got this thing that has attached itself to her and gives her these great powers, but it alienates her from the rest of the world. She can't just go around like Batman and tie up the bad guys, and leave them off on the steps of City Hall. It doesn't work that way in real life. She has something to contend with called 'due process of the law.' She's not a vigilante, she's a detective but she has this great ability to do whatever she wants. If she were a criminal, she'd be untouchable but she has a moral compass. How does she deal with it? How would you or I deal with it? That's the intriguing thing that we've put not only into *Witchblade*, but everything we do here at Top Cow. I want to have that extra layer of depth in everything we do, and I think that's where our success comes from."

The comic book's title does not refer to a female crusader. *Witchblade* is actually an arcane device, a transmitter of unparalleled



Nancy Soder as *WITCHBLADE*'s Pezzini. "Nancy is very attractive," says Marc Silvestri. "But you also believe that she is this New York City police detective."

power that Sara Pezzini has absorbed into her being. "We did that on purpose," said Silvestri. "We wanted to put people off guard. With Superman and Batman, it's always the name of the character. We thought it would be cool if the name of the book is the name of the sentient thing that has attached itself to Sara. It's a character in and of itself."

Taking a tip from Disney, Silvestri declared autonomy regarding the licensing and marketing of his characters. "Mark always had this dream, unlike the other guys who seemed to be happy just doing comics," recalls David Wohl. "Mark wanted his company to be more than that. I shared that vision. We really wanted to create properties that transcended comics. We've worked to create characters

that have a longevity outside of comics. Mark wanted to be a mini-Lucasfilm."

While rights were jealously guarded by Top Cow, licensing agreements resulted in images of the *Witchblade* and Sara Pezzini that were applied to clothes and toys. Moore Creations sculpted not only a bust of Sara, enmeshed within the *Witchblade*, but an alluring action figure of the heroine clad in a crimson dress. In a crossover with Marvel Comics, the latter company's Mephisto cracked the Top Cow universe to seduce Sara. Silvestri and Dan Halstead are the executive producers of a speculative film adaptation of the premise.

"We were always careful from day one," says Silvestri in regard to licensing movie rights. "We didn't want to do

anything campy I love *XENA* and *HERCULES*, but that's not what we wanted. We wanted to do something that nobody else has ever done before, and that was to take this superhero genre and treat it with respect. We wanted it to have a gritty look and feeling. It's kind of like *'THE X-FILES* meets *NYPD BLUE*.' You put that into this genre and you're going to shock a lot of people. It's not standard primary color, nor the strange angled campy fare that they've seen in the past with superheroes. This is a gritty, realistic show. It's a cop show."

The three-year germination period for *WITCH-BLADE* was long by TV standards. Silvestri teamed up with Illusion Pictures' Dan Halstead to hype the project because, notes Silvestri, "Halstead was one of the few people who got the concept." Eventually, TNT picked up the project with Warner Brothers footing the bill. While the cable network sidesteps queries about the movie's transition into a TV series, Silvestri freely admits that *WITCH-BLADE* is a pilot.

The popular *Witchblade* icon is a nude Sara entwined in the artifact's metallic tendrils, which strategically conceal the gorgeous detective's private parts, but don't look for this provocative image in the movie. "That's for the comic book audience," Silvestri admits. "Sara's a strong, sexy woman who is uncomfortable when the thing chooses to wrap itself around her like that. In the book, she's a pretty down-to-earth character who usually walks around in torn jeans and a leather jacket and hiking boots. This brings something out of her that she's not overt about. She's a beautiful woman, but she doesn't go prancing around like a supermodel. Quite frankly, it's not a bad thing to have someone who looks like that on the cover of a comic book. Just ask *Sports Illustrated* what they think of their swimsuit issue."



**“We didn’t want to do anything campy. I love XENA & HERCULES but that’s not what we wanted. We opted to treat the superhero genre with respect. This is real.”**

“The thing about Sara is that she’s a strong, well-rounded character. When you read those stories it’s Sara Fenzini on the inside who you’re really attracted to, the other stuff is just eye candy. We were pretty sensitive to the fact that TV is a different audience, and you can’t have someone running around in an armor-plated bikini and be taken seriously. It’s a drama, not BAYWATCH. It’s a character-driven story rather than effects driven. We wanted to make sure you could look past the physicality of the character. When we cast Yancy Butler, we were real careful. She’s a very attractive woman, but you also believe that she’s a New York City police detective. You also buy the fact that she’s confused about her new role in life.” □

Top Cow’s *Witchblade*: “We thought it was a great time to hit the market with a strong, reality-based female.”



# JENNIFER O'DELL LOST WORLD

THE SERIES' SMOKIN' JUNGLE GIRL IS EVICTING BIMBO STEREOTYPES, UPSTAGING CGI, & REVEALS THERE IS A EUROPEAN EDIT.

BY DAN SCAPPEROTTI

An assemblage of explorers, under the supervision of Professor Challenger (Peter McCauley), are stranded on an Amazonian plateau that's chock-full of prehistoric beasts, savages, cannibals and lost civilizations. That's right, it's cliffhanger periphery, incarnating Edgar Rice Burroughs with the fossilized film pulp of Irwin Allen and Sam Kateman. **SIR CONAN ARTHUR DOYLE'S LOST WORLD** is climbing up the Nielsen charts; the Canadian/Australian co-production has been renewed for another season.

Challenger's compatriots include Marquerite Krux (Rachel Blakely), a femme fatale with a guarded past and an equally enigmatic agenda. Then there's big game hunter Lord John Roxton (William Snow), journalist John Malone (David Orth) and Dr. Summerlee (Michale Sinclair).

Shortly after the gang crash lands on the thermal terrain, Malone discovers a mimic plant. Examining its blazing red flowers, he's



THE LOST WORLD: "I do all the fighting stuff on my own," insists O'Dell. "I do as much I can I do everything when I'm fighting, on horseback or underwater."

oblivious to the tentacles which are descending upon him. Malone is abruptly ensnared and dragged into the maw of the carnivorous organism. Suddenly, a stunning blonde, clad in a makeshift bikini, swings through the trees and quickly hacks off the monster's vegetal appendages. She introduces herself as Veronesi and explains that she has been alone since her parents disappeared ten years ago.

The voluptuous jungle girl is played by Jennifer O'Dell. Appearing in commercials as a juvenile, the aspiring actress modeled while attending Mt. Palomar Junior College. "I ended up in a Stephen King film, **SOMETIMES THEY COME BACK FOR MORE**," recounts O'Dell. "I read the profiles of the film's stars, Faith Ford and Chase Masterson, in an earlier issue of *Femme Fatales* [6.12]. Both interviews were great." She garnered prime time visibility on **BEVERLY HILLS, 90210**, **THE PROFILER** and **SILK STALKING**.

Cast in **LOST WORLD**, the Californian native pendulously shifts her character's demeanor from pensive adult to pouty waif. So





O'Day: "I've been criticized too long by boys and teens. Now my career is #1 in my life. I can't focus on guys because, at this point, they can't understand why I have to do love scenes."



whatever prompted her to play a role noteworthy for its constrained economy of wardrobe? "To pay my damn rent," O'Dell laughs. "It's hard being a blonde in this industry. They're constantly sending you out on blonde bimbo parts. This definitely wasn't. Veronica is a beautiful character to portray because she's got so much strength. And she's a jungle girl! What else can you ask for?"

"Veronica was born in the Lost World. Her parents went away exploring when she was about ten years old, and they never came back. She's constantly searching for them and now, 11 years later, she finds this group of expeditionary people and they get stuck in the Lost World with her. They need my character to survive in the primordial land because I was born and raised there, so I know how to survive. They're living with me in my two story tree house that has an elevator coming up in the middle of it. Well, I'm an intelligent jungle girl after all."

Denied access to designer shops in the uncivilized milieu, Veronica's costume designer is a two-piece leather ensemble with a lot of breathing room for cleavage. "We've got a stack of Veronica outfits on set," grins O'Dell. "It's something we put together with the wardrobe girl, and we kind of created this outfit. It's something that Veronica has made on her own. She wears what's necessary and that's it."

Plagued by ape men, dinosaurs, giant bees, lizard mutants and other denizens of the Lost World, Veronica is perpetually sprinting through jungles, falling off cliffs and plunging into swirling rivers. "Veronica knows how to get around," explains O'Dell. "She's like one with nature. Nature is her best friend, and she uses it to her advantage. With all the fighting that I do, I get out up and bruised at times—especially fighting in the rain and mud like we

#### JENNIFER O'DELL

**"It's hard being a blonde in this industry, they constantly send you out on blonde bimbo parts. But Veronica is such a great character to play because she's strong—and she's a jungle girl!"**



Fighting: "I choose my own destiny in life & I consider myself a good Christian." T&E: O'Dell in her WORLD as Veronica. "She wears what's necessary & that's it."

did over the last year. But I survive, and as long as I look good doing it—"

When O'Dell initially nailed the role, she was aware that histrionics and physical maintenance were both critical to her performance. After all, Veronica's home turf is central to the action. "I was training for about two months before I

went to Australia for shooting. I had to get myself into shape for it, strength-wise. Veronica is extremely strong and she does most of the fighting. She's the heroine of the show. I was trying to keep myself in shape and going to the gym, but now I'm working 12-14 hour days on set, and doing the constant running and the

fighting and the swimming and diving. Let me tell you, going on set is like going to the gym so, after a while, I didn't have to do anything separate but go to work. I have a stunt double, but I did all of my stunts except for the ones that the producers wouldn't let me do because they were too dangerous. All the fight stuff I do on my own. I do as much as I can. I do everything when I'm fighting, on horseback or underwater. There is some stuff the producers won't let me do, like jumping off two-story-high cliffs. They don't want me to get hurt. There was a scene that I did where I actually fell off a horse at full gallop...I'm the one you see fall off."

O'Dell describes the series as "kind of like three shows put together: It's Indiana Jones movies with the adventure and the fighting. It's like the X-FILES with the special effects in it. And it's like STAR TREK with the new people, where we're always trying to find our way home. It's got all these shows mixed together, which is great because you always want to know what's going to happen next. It's a very intelligent show like STAR TREK. It deals not only with the storyline but



with the characters.

"There are six main characters in this show, which is why I think the show is going over so well. For all of us to get along, and to work as well together, is very difficult to do. There are a lot of shows that only have two or three main characters in them and they may not go

continued on page 28

# LOST WORLD CGI EFFECTS DINOSAURS

YOU'VE MET THE BEAUTIES...NOW MEET TREVOR HAWKINS, THE CRAFTSMAN BEHIND THE BEASTS.

BY DAN SCAPPEROTTI

Dinosaurs are back. Big time. We're not talkin' about Walt Disney's articulate critters or Michael Crichton's Pacific Island retreat. We're focusing on the prehistoric varmints in **SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE'S THE LOST WORLD** (the producers were prompted to hyperbolize the more succinct title of Doyle's *Lost World* novel, hence circumventing confusion with a certain 1997 movie release). The TV pilot followed Doyle's novel fairly closely, replete with an early 20th-century expedition to the South American jungle that's detailed on a plateau which time has forgot. But the teleplay parts company with Doyle by embellishing the jungle milieu with not only dinosaurs but vampires, mutants and a blonde jungle girl who often rescues the castaways.

A Canadian-Australian co-production, the latter country's Photon Productions is responsible for on-set chores while Hybrid Technology, a Canadian company, develops the CGI effects. Photon's Trevor Hawkins, the visual effects supervisor, breaks down



CGI effects supervisor Trevor Hawkins (l) and director Richard Franklin shoot *THE LOST WORLD* on Australia's Gold Coast.

each script, produces the storyboards and manages the location work; to be precise, he ensures the "right elements" are shot to accommodate the visuals.

"Basically, I deal with things you can not film, that don't really exist—that's visual effects," says Hawkins. "We have the lion's share of dinosaur and matte work here in Australia. Hybrid is doing a lot of 3D work and additional compositing. We're here on location, so it's easier and faster to pull the elements together." The

series is shot on the continent's Gold Coast, just south of Brisbane. Most of the locations are in the countryside, only 20 minutes from the studio. "Private property owners usually make arrangements with the film companies," notes Hawkins. "The locations around the Gold Coast make up the rest of the *Lost World* with waterfalls, creeks, swamplands or jungles. It's all in easy access."

Several sets were created to accommodate all the lost civilizations and savage tribes that inhabit the plateau. "It's really pretty crowded there on the *Lost World*," laughs Hawkins. "There was a lot of set construction on location. The basic trick is to build only what the camera is going to see. It's pointless to build large sets and wasting huge amounts of money, when most of the time you're at ground level working with actors and dialogue. You do want to see a vast empty city or crumbling ruins, but it's pointless building that when they can build just a section of it and film a wide shot. The rest of the shot would have the caterers trucks and what have you in it. It's then our mission is to extend the

"We have the lion's share of dinosaur [work] and matte work," says Hawkins.

cityscape so there's not just one building or half a building sitting there. We have a whole series of buildings, lakes or waterfalls for that shot. There are certainly enough matte paintings in *THE LOST WORLD* to build up *The Lost World*."

In the episode "Tribune," the explorers drift into a race of Lizard Men whose culture has replicated the Roman Empire. "That was a substantial set they built," says Hawkins. "They had a large scale gladiatorial fight in the forum. We set up a camera on a large scaffolding tower to actually shoot down into this arena. Outside the arena was just wasteland. The producers, of course, wished to see the rest of the city. We had built some basic 3D shapes to help in the layout of the city, and then matte painted the rest of the city. There were additional lizard folk who wandered around in the background, and I think we also had slaves. We shot these people separately on green screens and composited these in, plus we had some chickens running around. So we built up this big picture, like a collage, from all the little pictures and built up the township.





A sheer Jennifer O'Dell vs. CGI. "When we shoot, we judge the size of objects—which are later added in post—with just a big X for our eye line," says O'Dell.

"Our mission is to extend and build upon limited sets. In episode five, those people live in Paradise so we have Paradise extensions with waterfalls, idyllic lagoons and the distant cliff lines to mark the boundaries of this civilization. We even stumble across a breakaway group of Egyptians so we have a chance to have a pyramid on the plateau. There's a mixture of civilizations."

Another challenge for Hawkins was a construction of an oversized beehive for the "Nectar" episode. One problem: no one could initially approximate the size of the dwelling's stingin' inhabitants. "When we are on location, it's very important that everyone—the directors, the actors—are aware of how big these things are. So, in many instances, we have built large cardboard cutouts of some of these beasts. In 'Nectar,' we went on location for the giant bee encounter. We would pull out of the truck, the cardboard bee. That basically gave everyone on location, including the cameraman, an idea of scale for reactions and framing. People would never

believe the actors if they didn't appear to be looking at the bee—unless, of course, you have a large cardboard reference as to where the beast was. We shot a lot of references when we were lining up the shot with the cardboard bee, and we would then film the shot without the cardboard bee, and Hybrid would use my cardboard bee as a reference of size and distance from the actors. That helped in the realization of a large bee. Once we entered the hive, we used matte paintings."

Occasionally, a *LOST* WORLD episode is tailored for separate markets: subdued scenes for the U.S. release are reshoot—with less

## TREVOR HAWKINS, DINO WRANGLER

**"There are two versions [of some episodes]. If someone's bathing in a waterfall, [they] may shoot a family-related shot and then a slightly more risqué shot for the European audiences."**

conservative content—for European territories. Sample the "Nectar" episode where a very naked Venus surfaces from a reservoir of honey. "There are two versions," confirms Hawkins. "If you have someone bathing in a waterfall, you may have your family-related shot and then a slightly more risqué shot. I was supervising the honey girl rising out of the honey pool, which was a combination of live-action, a matte painting and effects of the pool. The pool didn't exist. The bee queen basically stood in the middle of a large, empty pit but there was a mechanical device that she rose up on and Hybrid's mission was to fill up that pit. If you saw the rushes beforehand, you saw most of the film crew and the mechanical device to rise her up."

Of course, dinosaurs are critical to the series' scenario. "It's always a challenge on location, in a sense that you're not in a studio and your stomping around in places difficult to get to," says Hawkins. "We're open to the elements, and there are periods of rain that can make life interesting."

The mammoth reptiles

are a combination of live-action models and CGI effects. The Modelsmiths Studio, affiliated by David Tremont, sculpts dinosaurs from clay, some of which are reduced to half scale. Foam latex is poured into molds to make lightweight miniatures. A puppeteer, dressed in a chrome blue suit—frequently Tremont himself—uses rods to move the head, and open and close a T-Rex's mouth. Filmed against a blue screen with a Photon MILO motion control camera, Hybrid will later digitally remove the puppeteer and the rods.

"There are smaller scale puppets which we like to call 'miniatures,'" explains Hawkins. "We have miniature raptors and horned lizards. These models are a combination of rods and cables, which are sticking up from the backs. The cable operators operate the mouth. You'll have four or five puppeteers, all dressed in blue, crowded around a miniature raptor. The difficulty you have is then trying to digitally hide all these guys while you're filming the actual miniature. All these guys are in blue suits, so it ends up looking like a bunch of blue Ninjas."

"The miniatures are like actors, too, because you have to get performances out of them. That's a challenge, getting a performance out of a miniature beastie. It's magic to incorporate a miniature, that you've shot a month after live-action, and composite it together with an actor who's reacting to nothing. When the two come together, it's always a piece of magic." □

"Steven Spielberg had \$200 million for *JURASSIC PARK*," says Jennifer O'Dell. "We do each episode for a tiny fraction of that. We don't have puppets but we have CGI."



over—let alone having six, beside all the extras and the dinosaurs for God's sake."

Sustaining the tradition of Ray Harryhausen's stop motion dinosaurs, the more sophisticated CGI technology is—as Ms. O'Dell admits—"a bitch to work with. We have a new generation of actors out nowadays where we have to do a lot of our acting with nothing there. The monsters aren't digitally added until later in post-production, so we don't have something to react to. We have to definitely make the audience believe that there's something there. There's pretty much just a big 'X' for our eye line. There's a white 'X' in the air that's usually made of gaffer tape. We have to have eye lines for our special effects, and we do a lot of blue screen stuff. At times it's difficult, but when you see it all put together you say, 'Hey, that's looking good'—because you know that that wasn't there when we did it."

Although the daily rushes are available to the actors, O'Dell routinely passes on the privilege. "We get to see the rushes when we interact with the imaginary raptors and stuff," she notes, "but I don't like to see

#### JENNIFER O'DELL

**"The special effects are a bitch to work with. We have a new generation of actors nowadays who have to do lots of acting with nothing there... We don't have somebody else to react to."**



"My character is the one with nature. Nature is her best friend and she uses it to her best advantage. & W Rachel Eickley is the "More than Human" episode

I get myself in this position." I'm so cold I feel that my toes are going to fall off because I'm wearing so little, and everybody else is all bundled up. As soon as the cameras roll, I have to take my jacket off and look like it's second nature to me. I don't have any problem with it but, at times, it was really, really difficult. Actually, I'd rather be out on location than stuck in a studio. They actually built a two-story tree house in the studio. With the rain and the mud, we're constantly having to go in to do looping and stuff because there are rivers running and constant noise, and birds and stuff like that all the time. I'm exposed to winter year round because, by the time I get back to America, it'll be winter there, too.

The syndicated series has expanded to a global market, hence, more risqué footage is tailored for less provincial territories. Sample a scene in the "Nectar" episode, as the explorers examine the hive of monolithic bees, a very gorgeous and nude woman emerges from a deep pool of honey. "Yes, they also shoot a European version of the show which is a little more 're-washing,'" O'Dell reaffirms. "If we're going to show any T&A in the episode, then they'll show it in the European version. They're just shot a little differently. With me, they don't do it that often. There was one scene where I'm bathing in a waterfall but that's it with me, because I'm the sex symbol on the show to begin with so they stay away from that. They don't have to go there with me, but any other characters or guest stars that come on the show may call for that kind of stuff."

The capacious setting, embellished with matte paintings and computer technology, camouflages the budgetary constrictions. One standing set, which includes a deep pool and a waterfall, was constructed for all the cave sequences: it

it because, at that early stage, it's a rough cut and you see stick figures and things in camera—stand-ins for the beasts that will be added in post. I don't like to ruin the fantasy of it because, when it's all put together, it's amazing. I don't want people to think they're going to see stuff like they saw in JURASSIC PARK.

Steven Spielberg had \$300 million to do his movie, and we do each episode for a tiny fraction of that. We don't have the puppets but we have the CGI."

On film, these lush tropical forests are rendered into a tropical paradise. On location, one gets a different perspective. Since the seasons are reversed in the

Southern Hemisphere, the series' cast is actually shooting during Australia's winter.

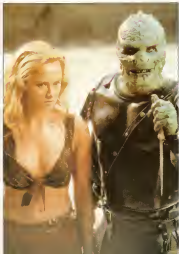
"It's just beautiful," sighs O'Dell. "But we're out in the rain forests where it rains a lot. The terrain isn't that easy to run, jump and deal with. I froze my butt off. There were times when I was asking myself, 'How did



O'Dell poses for  
FF photographer  
Dunn: "The fe-  
minine I've played  
in my movies are  
strong, not do-  
mest. I'd never do  
a role that de-  
scribes women."



had been recently redressed as the inner layer of a prehistoric hive. "Half of the sets are out on location," says O'Dell. "We have one set that they completely transform for each episode—it's for all of the tribes and villages that we find—yet they're on the same locations. For instance, the caves and the beehive are on location; we augmented the interior of the hive in the studio with a lot of blue screen and CGL. I have to say the beehive was of the most impressive sets because it looked so rich and so real. It amazes me when I see the episodes. I think, 'My God, that wasn't there before.' And they make it look a lot bigger than it actually is."



The series' romantic angles are subordinate to the action, but two liaisons are incrementally smoldering. Marquerite, who evokes Joan Collins' tempestuous bravado (LAND OF THE PHAROHS comes to mind) sustains a love-bate camaraderie with Roston. A platonic amity has developed between Veronica and Malone. "He is from the real world and someone who is intriguing to Veronica," explains O'Dell. "Malone plays the love interest for her but they will never go there because if we ever go home, the story will be over. The producers always want people to be guessing. If there was anybody I would be interested in on the show, it would be Malone. My char-





actor is stronger than him. It keeps my innocence there. Baxton and Marguerite have got the constant banter going on between them, and ours is very innocent and touching. In later episodes, we got a little more in-depth meaning to our feelings."

Last year, *FF* was introduced to O'Dell when she was cast in *POINT DOOM*. The actress professed a "belief in fate" and a resistance "to [T&A] films. I'm better than that. The ladies in my movies are gorgeous but internally tough." And fate rewarded O'Dell with *THE LOST WORLD*—and an heir to the tough ladies she's explored in the embryonic stage of her film career. □

O'Dell [4] points to Sandra Bullock as a renaissance woman: "She doesn't have the best body in the world but she's so cute and sweet, it makes her so much more real." O'Dell in the "More than Women" [5/week] and "King and I" [30] episodes.





Though occasionally requiring run-ins, brotherly bonds that few **LOST** WOULD fans dispute: "You get upset; she's cynical. I was really attracted to her attitude."

# RACHEL BLAKELY LOST WORLD

THE SAUCY AUSSIE ON DINOSAURS, DAMSELS-IN-DISTRESS, COSTUMES, CATFIGHTS &—DID WE MENTION?—THE EUROPEAN CUT.

By DAN SCAPPEROTTI

Hey, if she has to sleep with a lizard man to avert the rescue of her friends—and, naturally, save her own skin in the process—it's all in a day's work for *LOST WORLD*'s Marguerite Kraus, who's played by Rachel Blakely. The sultry Australian thespian was born in Borneo. Her father's oil industry career transplanted his family from Spain to Scotland to Canada. After a year's residence in the United States, the brood settled in Australia.

New Zealand, geographically less than a stone's throw away from Australia, prompted Blakely to cross over for assignments in *YOUNG HERCULES* and the "Ulysses" episode of *XENA, WARRIOR PRINCESS*; in the latter, she played the long-suffering Penelope, whose spouse, Ulysses, has been addled with a 10-year tenure in the Trojan Wars. Teaming up with the Greek hunk, Xena conspires his extrication to Ithaca and Penelope's waiting arms. "I had a lot of fun doing XENA," recalls Blakely. "It was great watching Lucy Law-



Blakely as *LOST WORLD*'s Marguerite Kraus: "She's lots of fun to play. Anything can come out of her mouth and she can get away with it because she is saucy."

less on set to see how she works and does the action. Penelope was basically a queen whose husband had disappeared a decade before. They were childhood sweethearts. He eventually came back and reclaimed the kingdom, and his queen, just in time. But, I think he may have been secretly in love with Xena. I

also played young Herc's mother on the telemovie."

When queried about her minor role in *MR. NICE GUY*, a Jackie Chan vehicle, Blakely cringes. "I was so bad in that," she sighs. "The movie, itself, is pretty fun but I was terrible. I was the resident bad girl, the female leader of this bad gang who turns good in the end and

ended up helping to save the day. It was fun. Initially, I was only supposed to be working for a couple of days, but they kept writing my character in and giving me more and more to do which one can't complain about. I didn't actually have scenes with Jackie Chan, but he was on set a lot of the time directing and helping direct. He would step in on the action stuff and show me how to do things. He's very energetic and, as you can probably tell, he has a huge capacity to enjoy life and just grab it and absolutely run with it."

Last winter, Blakely was in *MAX NIGHT, ULTRA SPY*, which premiered on UPN. The Australian-themed film starred Michael Landes as a high-tech, surrogate James Bond. Blakely appeared in a dual role as both Claire, Night's computer-generated assistant, and Ricki, who allies with the dapper hero in a search of her abducted, technology-savvy sister. "I had more fun playing Claire than I did playing Ricki," says Blakely. "I filmed my Claire scenes on a box standing in front of a blue screen. That was fun for me. I didn't have any-

body there. Michael had already flown back to the States so I was watching a finger moving around the room for my eyes to follow. It was a difficult thing to do. Quite challenging. I think both of them are in love with Max, Ricki, of course, doesn't know it in the beginning but eventually she falls in love with him, Claire is a computer with soul. She's been programmed by Max and I think Max has given her something a little bit extra. She's not just a numbers cruncher, she has a life of her own, she has an attitude of her own. When she sees Max being taken away from her by this Ricki woman, she gets a little miffed about it."

The super agent is up against a maniac who, on the cusp of global genocide, intends to download his conscience—as well as the psyche of his band of cutthroats—into cyberspace. As the countdown to Armageddon begins to tick, Night and Ricki eventually locate the missing sibling Ricki turns into a classic damsel-in-distress as a captive of the anarchist, she's bound and her brain is downloaded. "I enjoyed being tied up in that chair for hours and days and

Outlighting w/ Jennifer O'Dell in the "Procedural Father" episode "That was just hysterical. We had such a ball!"



## RACHEL BLAKELY

**"Nude scenes are basically day-to-day stuff, like taking a bath and being surprised by a dinosaur. It's not, 'Here, let me strut around the tree house and show you what I've got.'"**



Supporting Michael Landes, Blakely played a dual role in MAX NIGHT: ULTRA. SPT: "I enjoyed being tied in a chair for days! I read two books between takes."

days," Blakely laughs. "That wasn't so much fun. I spent days in that chair with the gag in my mouth, during the dance and mind-sucking scene. I think I read two books between takes in that time. Ricki was quite similar to a character that I had played a few years ago on a television series called NEIGHBORS. In the show, which was very popular in Britain and Europe, I was cast as a bumbling girl. Ricki isn't a real idiot, but more of a victim in life than Claire is. Claire is very much in control and although Ricki was fairly strong, she was the victim of the film, really. Everybody else was quite strong and she's just thrown around from experience, not quite knowing what was going on around her."

"MAX NIGHT is kind of a throwback to the '80s sort of superhero. But I think Michael Landes does a wonderful job with comedy. His sense of comic timing is just brilliant."

A couple of years ago, the

actress had appeared as Isabelle Reed in an Australian television series called TALES OF THE SOUTH SEAS. "Isabelle was the black sheep," recalls Blakely. "I seem to have a knack for playing these characters. She was very fiery. She was a convict who was accused of her boyfriend's murder. In fact, William Snow—who plays Roston on THE LOST WORLD—played the lead character and I played the lead female. He believed in her and believed that she wasn't guilty. She had a thing for him, but he had no desire to have anything to do with her, so she spent the entire series making life miserable. We shot the 23 episodes in Queensland. The beaches there are beautiful but they can be deadly. The hottest time of the year, when you want to go in and have a swim, you can't because you'll die from contact with the jellyfish. I don't swim in summer...not that far north."

When casting for THE LOST WORLD was in development, producer Jeffrey

Hayes remembered Blakely from his TALES OF THE SOUTH SEAS series and tapped her for the role of cryptic femme fatale, Marguerite Krux. "We worked really well together, and he kept me in mind when he had a new show come along. I think he believed that I could do it and he wanted me in it."

The series offers a couple of recurrent female characters. Blakely plays the vamp and Jennifer O'Dell, as chaste and bikini-clad Veronica, limits her swinging to somersaulting from vine to vine. "Veronica's the strong, moral girl," summarizes Blakely. "She's strong and righteous, but the innocent of the group. She's untouched by the world and it's greed, while that's what Marguerite lives for..."

"I was attracted by Marguerite's attitude. The fact that nobody really likes her I think is very nice. She's got punk, she's dynamic. She's just a lot of fun to play. I knew when I read the lines, that they had written for her, that I would enjoy saying them. That's a big thing, especially during an action series, where a lot of the time you're standing around fighting dinosaurs or you're running through the bush or you're fighting a native tribe. You need to have a creative outlet, and for me being able to say those words that they write for her is a lot of joy."

"I think it's quite witty. She's fabulous, she's just so much fun to play. Each time I get a script, I turn a page and think, 'Yes, another great line,' and then I turn the page again and 'Yes, another great line.' I think the writers have a lot of fun writing for her because she can say anything. Anything can come out of her mouth. And she can get away with it because she is really nasty."

Among the legion of male explorers trapped on the uncharted plateau, safari guide Roston—played by William Snow—appeals to

Marguerite; but we're not talkin' steamy, Tarzan-yodeling, monkey passion but a love-hate relationship further inhibited—notes Blakely—by “Marguerite’s very shady past. Now Marguerite was abandoned by her mother and father when she was a child. So she’s grown up with this major complex and she believes that, to make herself happy, all she needs is wealth and she would have done anything to get it. During one of the wars, she was involved in Germany and was kind of a Mata Hari character. She’s basically been all around the world—everywhere you can think of—manipulating and stealing and having wild, passionate affairs. I would imagine.... Anyway, the script writers haven’t told me that but that’s how I see Marguerite. She’s a black widow. She’s in it for whatever she can get out of it. But she does have a soul in there somewhere, and Roston is pretty much the only one who brings it out of her. There is actually a softer side of her where he’s concerned.

“Roston likes my character a lot. William Snow and I have a great dynamic, and we’ve worked together before as well. We adore each other’s company, we hang out together on set. We chat and gossip and discuss personal problems. We’re each other’s lifeline on set, we really get along. We have fun with it. I think they enjoy writing for that, too. It’s one of those things that if you find a couple of characters that have a certain spark together on-screen, then keep it like that.”

The first season consisted of 20 episodes, but the count will increase to 22 for the subsequent year. “And we shoot *LOST WORLD* during Australia’s winter months because, during the summer, there’s too much rain,” Blakely explains.

The series routinely requires altercations between the cast and dinosaurs; since the beasts are inserted later in post-production,



Blakely adds kudos to *THE LOST WORLD*: “The writers and wardrobe people are constantly trying to find ways to get me out of my podgums & put me into something else. With every new civilization we’ve created, I seem to borrow clothes.”

Blakely & Co. have no choice but to react to stand-ins. “There are cardboard cut outs on a stick that some guy is running around with,” grins the actress. “Or there is nothing there, and we’re given a spot on a tree to look at, or the first director or someone will make a big noise and we’re told to look a certain way. It’s quite difficult reacting to nothing

and sometimes it’s a bit farcical. When you’re doing it, you may feel a bit silly but when you see it cut together, you can’t be too big—you can’t go too far over the top with the reactions—because, in reality, they’re bugs. I think some of the dinosaurs work really well and some of them are not so good. I spoke to the producer the other day and he said

they’ve worked out a way to make the new shows better. He said the dinosaurs are going to look much slicker and much better. You have to understand that we’re doing an hour of television every seven days. To compare it to something like *JURASSIC PARK* is kind of unfair. Our effects people do matte paintings, and things like that, amazingly well.

They build one of those buildings or a corner of one, like the one that we're physically touching, and everything else they will make in. I can even see people walking around in the background, on a sort of Inca building, two miles in the background. I don't know how they do it but they do a fantastic job. I thought the giant hees were really great."

In "Out of Time"—the show's first episode after the pilot feature—the 20th-century coalition encounter a breed of "lizard men" whose civilization adheres to the Roman Empire culture. Captured and sentenced to death, Marguerite—a sly smile on her face—decides to wield her feline charms upon the Tribune. "I bumped into Jerome Ehlers, the guy who played the lizard man, on the street," relates Blakely. "And he said to me, 'My God, Rachel, when I saw that episode I thought, 'Oh no, she's not going to do it with the lizard is she?' I couldn't believe it. It looked so bizarre, you coming on to a lizard...' And he was the lizard. You know when he took the mask off, it wasn't the same. I kind of liked the lizard."

Though the expedition is stranded in a prehistoric milieu, Marguerite is afforded ample opportunity to shed her chic duds. "Of course they love Jennifer (O'Dell) in her costume because, let's face it, she looks fantastic," shrugs Blakely. "But the writers and wardrobe people are constantly trying to find ways to get me out of my jodhpurs and put me into something else. Every new civilization we come across, I seem to borrow clothes—or the king forces me to dress up as his queen—so I have a new outfit and they can get me into different costumes. So that's fun."

"I think the writing is great, the directors have been wonderful and our guest cast is usually pretty amazing to work with. For me it's great because most of

#### RACHEL BLAKELY

**"During one war, my character was kind of a Mata Hari character. She's a black widow. She's been all around the world...manipulating, stealing and having some wild, passionate affairs."**



LOST WORLD: T. Searching for a "birthright," Blakely turns up some treasure. "Marguerite believes that to make herself happy, all she needs is wealth." R. Inside the T-Rex. "We do it hour of TV every 7 days! To compare it to some thing like JAGGED PAUSE is kind of insane. Our 60 people do amazingly well."



the guest cast are Australians, and Australians that I admire in the industry. We're very fortunate that we got some of Australia's best actors to come and work on our show."

In retrospect, giant hees, a T-Rex or two and savage tribes are only inconveniences. The real life liabilities of functioning within THE LOST WORLD are the shooting venue and the very authentic creepy-crawlies.

"There are probably two pitfalls on the series," says Blakely. "One is rest. We work 14-hour days minimum and it gets pretty tiring. It's okay for the first few months but, at the end of the seventh month, you're really tired and ready for a rest. The other one is probably leeches and ticks and spiders and snakes. I have not had any yet, but I'm petrified. I don't mind living away from home because I

love the cast and the crew I work with, and I don't mind the harsh conditions. It rains a lot, it's muddy, it's cold or it's hot. None of that is really a problem. Just the lack of sleep."

Perhaps in homage to DYNASTY's Joan Collins/Linda Evans contretemps, Marguerite and Veronica erupt into catfight in the "Prodigal Father," episode (a mud hole subs for a swimming pool). "Basically, something happens to Veronica and she kind of loses the plot a little bit, and she's trying to kill Roxton," says Blakely. "Marguerite isn't terribly happy about that and, just as Veronica is about to kill him, Marguerite comes running through the bush, crash tackles her into the mud pond and they proceed to wrestle in the mud. That was hysterical. They had two stunt women there, one for each of us. They did the sequence first, and then Jennifer and I did the stunt sequence and the fighting and kicking and choking. I think they used one tiny portion of the stunt girls but everything else was us. We had such a ball..."

"I don't have a lot of stunts to do. I do a lot of running and jumping and getting tackled and dropped and hit. Jennifer is the one who does most of the action stuff, and she's really good. She's very good at fighting. She does all her own fights. Anything dangerous, like jumping out of trees, they get a stunt person to do."

All that physical strain has debilitated one of the ensemble. "That's right, one of the actors is constantly falling over," Blakely reveals. "I don't know if I should tell you which one. We all have hats on which actual take of the scene he is going to fall over on. Whenever we have to run or climb a hill, or make a quick getaway, he will fall over. And we just crack up laughing. Of course, it has to be Roxton, doesn't it?—the great white hunter. Summerlee [the coterie's elder



X, Roquemore & Jennifer O'Dell ("They love Jerry in her costume; she looks fantastic."); Z, Sizzling World. It's all about the 1940s. R, Reviewing the 1940s among fashion.



member, played by Michael Sinickoff) is very careful. But Rexien is so gung-ho. We work in mud that's sometimes up to our ankles, and we're all running around and he does everything at 100% and 100 miles an hour. He doesn't have a break button and he just keeps going until he falls over."

Syndicated internationally, THE LOST WORLD includes scenes that are prudently shot for the U.S. and optionally filmed—with racier content—for

European markets. "We don't send the nude hits to the States," Binkley declares. "There was a nude scene in 'More Than Human.' One of the guest cast got her clothes off in that one. Boy, she looked good, too—I can tell you! Everyone at the screening just went, 'Ahhh.' My goodness. The nude scenes are basically day-to-day stuff like bathing. It's not, 'Here let me take my clothes off, and strut around the tree house and show you what I've got.' It's taking a bath and being surprised by a dinosaur or somebody and having to grab your clothes and run. That kind of thing. It only happened twice with me."

One of those two unveilings was shot for the opening scene of the "Camelot" episode: a youthful King Gawain observes a nude Marguerite rising from a lake and, in the tradition of medieval legend, professes

that she is the Lady of the Lake.

"They always have a safety diver in the water with you," says Binkley. "It was so cold the last time I did it that the safety diver, who was in the water with me and had a full wet suit on, was freezing. I knew he had been in there a bit longer than I had, but he was shaking. It was incredible and to make it look like it's sunny and you're happy and smiling—when all you want to do is shiver and get out—in real acting."

The success of an effects-laden, weekly hour-long program is partially contingent upon technological reformation. If you can't bring the actors to the fx studio, then the studio must follow the actors. "We work at such a fast clip, that they actually bring out huge blue screens onto the set," says Binkley. "We work on one shot and then straight onto



the blue screen set. On odd occasions, we've had to go into the central studio but that's pretty rare. In the pilot, we did some of the halloween stuff in the studio, but now they got a big crane out onto the set and hoist the halloween up into the air—I mean, we're actually swinging through the air. That's quite fun actually. I did get a bit seasick last time. Or air sick...whatever. I felt terrible." □





# Delia Sheppard



"Eventually, I got into jazz and modern dance. Then I got an offer to dance at the Lido. I was told I'd have to get used to working in a G-string. That took about a week." (Photo: Jan Goss)



"The greatest pleasure working with Dalia is her command of the classical, aristocratic traditions," says playing Jan Bruck. "She's larger than life, a combination of Sophia Loren and Julie Strain."

**PROFILE BY  
MITCH PERSONS**

Let's cut to the chase: Mynusku Productions' *THE DRAGON GATE* is nasty. Written, produced by and starring Daniel J. Coplan, the film's violence is pretty uncompromising: human appendages are squashed into goulash. The catalyst for the martial arts mayhem is a prosperous Los Angeles businessman and self-defense expert (Coplan) who is transported by a benign master (Geoffrey Lewis), to a surreal, Sadian parlor that's somewhat akin to wading through a blood bath. His mission: rescue a kidnapped girlfriend. En route to the rescue, Coplan has a rendezvous with The Cloistered Woman, a kindred spirit who offers solace and a balm for the hero's fevered brow. Significantly, the few sedate minutes in her sanctuary are the film's only scenes heretofore of carnage. But the big surprise is the casting of *The Cloistered Woman*. Played by Delia Sheppard, who—groomed as the previous decade's crowning “blonde bombshell”—has evoked a scorchy screen presence that's been anything but cloistered.

The 5'10" Danish beauty's showbiz apprenticeship includes experience as a dancer in both South Africa and France, not to mention a gig as a Vegas showgirl. One year after she was photographed as a *Penthouse* Pet (April, 1985), Sheppard launched a film career as a seductress in the likes of *HAUNTING FEAR* (complete with love scenes that prompted an “unrated version”), *ROOTS OF EVIL*, *SINS OF DESIRE*, *ANIMAL INSTINCTS*, *BODY CHEMISTRY III*, *SECRET GAMES*, *WITCHCRAFT II: THE TEMPTRESS*, etc. But the erotic thriller diva abruptly did a vanishing act

**“In films these days, women are pretty much used as scenery and not much else. I don't fault the filmmakers. The actresses simply aren't there; they're so boring.”**



Tab Sheppard, as *The Cloistered Woman*, offers solace to *DRAGON GATE* on-site/producer/screenwriter Dan Coplan. “That movie was extremely gory, but my part of the picture was not. I would react differently with Daniel again.”



in 1994. She made a comeback last year, appearing in *THE DRAGON GATE* and Oliver Stone's *ANY GIVEN SUNDAY*.

“The reason I enjoy playing complicated characters, like the one in *THE DRAGON GATE*, is because I am not really a very complicated person,” insists Sheppard. “These roles are attractive to me, because these people do and say things that I wouldn't in everyday life. In one of my films, *NIGHT RHYTHMS* [1992], I was a radio therapist, but she was actually a really and character...very dark and complex.”

“One type of role that I try to steer clear of is a violent type of person, although I've certainly had my share of those kinds of roles. In *HAUNTING FEAR* [1990], I played a real sociopath. I hate to admit it, but I had a lot of fun on that one. The story is about a woman who cannot close her eyes. She cannot go to sleep without having this recurring dream of being buried alive. Because she's driving him bananas, and because she's losing her marbles anyway, he decides to make her dream come true and bury her alive. I'm having an affair with this guy, naturally, so we do the typical horror thing where we're gleefully nailing the wife in this coffin—and he and I are both getting off on it, and it's just wonderful because we're both so twisted. Then we put the box in the basement, and go through all the stocks and bonds and talk about how rich we're going to get. Then, of course, the wife breaks out. There is one nightmarish scene of her breaking through the kitchen window while I'm there waiting for my lover to come home, and she's chasing me with a butcher knife. Really typical horror...fun, corny stuff.”

“But my being in that film was an exception. We

**PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
JAN DEEN**

have more than enough violence in our films already. When I see that somebody is doing a movie with a lot of violence, and they say, 'This is something really unique, never been done before,' I say, 'Big deal, it's just one more bloody movie.'

**"THE DRAGON GATE** was extremely gory, but the part of the film I was in was not. The woman I play, The Cloistered Woman, is a guide in a way; she is also a deterrent to test warriors, to see if they can stick on the right route to become the complete warrior. That scene is inter-



esting because Dan Coplan is a very gentle man, and I think it's so effective because it is a very personal scene for him. He's fascinating. He's a practicing attorney, a writer, a producer and he really fancies himself an actor, too. We're always corresponding with each other, because we work so well together and we've both studied martial arts. I would definitely work

**"Back in the 1940's and '50s, the women ruled Hollywood because powerful women existed. They were an inspiration for all writers. But look at today's actresses..."**



"I'd never go out of my way to be a B-movie actress." L. W. Sylvester: Stallone in ROCKY V. "My part could have been played by a department store mannequin."

with him again.

"I've worked with Oliver Stone a few times. The latest was the football film he directed, ANY GIVEN SUNDAY. It deals mainly with the controversial side of football—the steroids and the mess that goes on behind the scenes that people want to see. I played this sociable girl who hangs out with Cameron Diaz who, along with her mother—played by Ann-Margret—are the owners of a team. Now, I know Oliver well. I love the man, but I had absolutely no interest in this film at all. The reason? It's a football film. I don't think anybody really cares about a football film. Oliver is going to make a fortune on this movie, he always does, and he's had a great cast—Al Pacino as the coach, Dennis Quaid, Jamie Foxx—big draws all. But the movie is just plain boring.

"As boring as ANY GIVEN SUNDAY is to me, I believe that Oliver is incapable of making a completely lackluster film. He is an interesting filmmaker, a complicated person and I guess that makes for genius. Some of the scenes on the playing field, the slow motion... you can just imagine the way he shoots. He's also a wonderful writer but he's hard on the set. He doesn't plan his schedule, so an actress may find herself working 14-hour days, doing a lot of re-takes and things like that.

"There are so many pretty women in this movie. I understand that that happens in the real football world; there are always the gorgeous girls around for decoration and recreation. And that brings me to a pet gripe of mine. In films these days, women are pretty much used as scenery and not much else. For that, I don't fault the filmmakers. The actresses simply aren't there. They're all so boring. Back in the forties and fifties, the women ruled Hollywood because powerful women existed. It wasn't a stretch for a writer to say,

"Wow, I'm going to write this amazing character! They were writing the roles for those actresses because they were flesh and blood. You think of a Bette Davis or a Barbara Stanwyck or an Ingrid Bergman or an Ava Gardner...there were so many of them. So powerful. That would be an inspiration for any writer. But look at the actresses now. I don't get excited because I see a Julia Roberts movie—'GoshAAA, she's so powerful, she's so magnificent'—I don't see myself thinking that way about her. I was watching WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF not too long ago. That film couldn't have been written for anybody but Elizabeth Taylor, because she is this incredibly amazing, complicated person.

"We do, of course, have Sigourney Weaver. I really do love her work. She is wonderful. She's made some great choices and I could probably go in the same direction as she would, if I had her kind of clout. I would make the same choices. GORILLAS IN THE MIST, ALIENS, WORKING GIRL...The woman is good.

"Sigourney is just one of a very few, though. Who are supposedly regarded as the top actresses in Hollywood? Michelle Pfeiffer? She's okay. Uma Thurman? She has a lot of charm, and she's a go-getter...and she's funny and she's sexy. Charlize Theron is good. I knew Charlize when I was living in South Africa some years ago, and now she's really making a good living for herself. She's playing opposite the most wonderful leading men, but she's kind of one-dimensional. She's gorgeous and has a great body, but she's no Barbara Stanwyck. What we need are more women like Stanwyck. How about Sophia Loren? There's no Sophia Loren of the '90s. Those actresses of today look fabulous and are true femme fatales, but they don't even dress nicely when they go out. They all wear the same



"I read for **BASIS** [DISTINCT] several times. It was an effort from the time I've done for *Asie* or *Paul* [Clea Ray], except it was produced for \$40 million. *Basie* trailers are all the same old clichés." Photo: Dan Golden

bering, old Versace gown. Come on now, girls, get a guy to design something original for you. Stop trying to just wear labels.

"This industry has that same cookie-cutter mentality now. Filmmaking has become such a machine. A lot of people are working but they're all mediocre. And then you have all these wonderful actresses who get caught up in the mess, and don't really get a focus. Film has always been a big industry, even in the '40s and the '50s, but it's now become so massive, there's no room to feature artists who are really gifted.

"Half of the scripts that I get offered, I don't even want to finish reading. They are so weak, the characters are so badly developed. I was in *ROCKY V* and, although I appear throughout the film and have some good scenes, it was a very badly-written script for the woman's part. Sylvester Stallone does not know how to write for women, I'm afraid. Not too many writers do, considering how little they have to work with. Writers seem to sense this and they are always asking for input, but when you do give it, it's regarded as an insult. It's like saying they've written a weak character. They always ask you, 'Oh, let us know what you think, if you have any suggestions,' but it's not very well accepted.

"One film I am seriously considering doing is called *THE DREAM CATCHER*, which has a lot of rich detail and good, solid characterizations. It has to do with a Native American mystery. The script is about a teenage boy who goes on a journey to find his long-lost mother, because he was adopted by white people. He then encounters my character, a fascinating woman who has gone on many journeys in search of the truth. She has encountered the boy's mother—a very gifted psychic, kind of like a medicine woman—so she takes this young guy under her

**"I was in *ROCKY V*. I have good scenes, but it was a very badly-written screenplay for the female parts. Sylvester Stallone doesn't know how to write for women."**



TAB: Shepherd was cast in the *ROCKY* 'N' ROLL DETECTIVE product reel. "I did it as a favor to [producer] Jeff Sandoval, the first one to give me a film part."



wing, and they go on a journey to find his mother. It's a very interesting story line.

"I want to work on good projects like that. And if nobody else is going to write it, or offer it, I'll create it myself. In the meantime, I am not sitting around waiting for scripts like *THE DREAM CATCHER* to come my way. I've been involved in Naturopathy—Chinese medicine, the science of healing using herbology—for around 15 years, and am going for my degree.

"I've also formed my own production company. I mainly deal with corporate events, and arrange entertainment for big businesses that come into various cities. If I want to write and produce my own films, I am getting a taste of what it's like to get money together and to sell an appealing idea. For instance, a big corporation like Philip Morris cigarettes will come in and they'll say, 'We'd like to have maybe a hand-balancing act, or some aerial number, during a dinner party.' I have all the friends and the connections to actually book them up with these artists. So it's a matter of juggling, and connecting the right people with Philip Morris.

"Yes, I know what you're thinking. You're wondering why—if I'm into natural medicine—why I would even consider taking a job offered by a cigarette company. I'm not that radical. It's all part of the game, the all part of the picture. They exist, they're out there, they have money and I have the entertainment that they want to pay money for.

"Personally, I don't like cigarettes because they don't make me look good. They really do wreck a person's looks, that's the only thing I have tried them when I lived in Paris in the '80s, everybody smoked then. But you wake up, you feel terrible and it takes two hours to get your body and mind together. I know it's kind of a very narcissistic reason to quit but, as we've all heard, any excuse to stop smoking is a good one. □



"Dena is an inspiration to classical pinups," notes photographer Jon Davis. "She's especially ironic as a showgirl. Up until now, her film career was a by-product of irresponsible management."

# DINA MEYER

## SECRET AGENT MAN

THE EX-"STARSHIP TROOPER"/"DRAGON SLAYER" SHIFTS FROM S-F TO PRIME TIME PULCHRITUDE.

BY DAN SCAPPEROTTI



She obviously doesn't play the title role in SECRET AGENT MAN, however, Ms. Meyer steals the spotlight from co-stars Donnie Whitfield & Costas Mandylor

*June, 2000. She was a shoo-in for the role. Effortlessly hot Dina Meyer—who kicked ass in DRAGONHEART, BATS, JOHNNY MNEMONIC and STARSHIP TROOPERS—was cast as a femme fatale in a TV series that incarnated spy-fi, 1960's-style. Bat, while wrapping up this article, I was informed that UPN deep-sixed the show. Go figure: a few months ago, Meyer & Co. were optimistic SECRET AGENT MAN would fly. I remember it as if it were yesterday (cue for harp music).*

*March, 2000. Exempting GET SHORTY and FOR LOVE AND MONEY, director Barry Sonnenfeld's mainstream commerce—THE ADAMS FAMILY, MEN IN BLACK and THE WILD, WILD WEST—is partially fueled on state-of-the-art technology. But his short-lived 1998 TV series, MAXIMUM BOB—conceptualized sans special effects—earned critical admiration as a result of its dark, haroque slant on redneck politics.*

*His subsequent series,*





DINA MEYER

**"I love doing comedy. People have said that I should be doing more of it. Sometimes we don't have a choice. Sometimes we're stuck doing bat movies and bug movies, but I love comedy."**

the syndicated **SECRET AGENT MAN**, is a *Blade* hybrid of eccentric humor and CGI. The premise is retro-MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E. (i.e. a '64 series that milked the burgeoning Bond trend): a top secret agency employs a trio of undercover agents to bust anarchic renegades. Monk (Costas Mandylor) is a suave operator whose reluctance to play-by-the-book provokes the ire of kingpin Brubeck (Paul Guilfoyle). Wielding a streetwise 'tude, Davis (Dondra Whitfield) is the new recruit hired to counter Monk's ungovernable tactics. Finally, Holiday—played by Dina Meyer—is the federation's peerless femme, liberally mixing cunning with kung-fu.

"What woman wouldn't be attracted to this role?" queried Meyer. "Holiday is very smart, strong, driven, physically adept, capable of doing just about anything. She's the kind of woman I wish I was. There is no back story on Holiday, we pick up the thread in the middle and they're already there."

She is one of the agency's top secret agents. Her match is Monk, our secret agent man. Together, they have this relationship that is competitive, a little bit sexually driven. There is plenty of tension between the two of us, although we'd never want the other one to know. There is a mutual respect and, I think, a mutual love for one another although, again, you'll never find us admitting that.

"Between the interesting story lines, the eye candy and the music, it's a really fun, fast-paced light comedy. There's nothing like it on television right now."

Never mind that the Cold War has been defused. "Our characters are very close to James Bond," said Meyer, "—or Maxwell Smart or Agent 99. But sometimes it feels like we're Charlie's Angela and Brubeck, who gives us our missions each week, is our Charlie. In the beginning of each episode, obviously the tease, something has gone wrong and evil is

L. Meyer on Holiday: "I go out for a lot of roles, not just strong female characters. But these are the type of roles I seem to get." R. w/ Mandylor & Whitfield





Roper on a badly kept SECRET: "The women portrayed as Hollywood Stars are always leeching on to the guy's arm for support. I'm talking about wimpy women, hanging around with their clothes ripped off." —at With Mandel and Whitfield



lurking in a dark corner. Brubeck will usually tune us in to what's going on. One of our arch-enemies who works for an agency, called Trinity, could have stolen some secrets or kidnapped a telekinetic boy who is capable of moving satellites with his mind. It's never easy, although we make it look light and fun."

In one episode, the agents cripple a plague that was developed to make money. "The virus is let loose by the bad guys and they kidnap the good guy's daughter," explained the actress. "They force him to make the vaccine so that when they let loose the smallpox virus, they can make a commercial killing. They'll release the virus and everyone will want the vaccine, hence they'll charge whatever they want and they'll all be millionaires. Of course, we have to stop that evil plot."

Not unlike Mr. Bond, the agents are adept at skills that prove practical as plot expedients. "We're all very good at what we do," smiled Meyer. "In one episode, I'm this fantastic archer! Personally, I've never picked up a bow and arrow in my life but, in this episode, all of a sudden I'm this star archer. In another episode, I was a pro golfer. Again, I've never picked up a golf club. We are physically capable of anything with the help of Davis, the research manager."

There's more 007 conceit with a variety of hardware conveniently used to plug plot holes: "We have these great gadgets. For some reason, we never have a place to put them but they always pop up when we need them. We have these neat little PBA communicators that look like a Palm Pilot. We talk into them and we see each other like little Watchmen. We have these little earplugs so we can hear everything—of course, only when the story makes it convenient to hear them. It's funny because we can hear

each other when we need to, we can see each other when we need to, and we have these gadgets whenever we need them.

"One of the gadgets is a vacuum pen with enough suction power to pull your eyeball out of your head. If a smallpox virus was released into the air, we could actually suck it out of the air if we caught it in time. We have next little laser-type gadgets. I don't really play with the toys, that's more the domain of Monk and Davis."

Characters are showcased in their own individual episodes. Meyer's turn came with "Breach," which she identifies as "the sixth episode that was shot. Bruheck, our boss, takes a day off during the middle of this crisis and leaves the agency in my hands. I run the agency, and all the trials and tribulations that go along with it."

The settings fluctuate from China to Europe, but Meyer admits "the exotic locales are actually all on our set in Vancouver. Right now, we have back alleys doubling for back alleys in Hong Kong. Conveniently enough, the agency looks exactly the same in every city in which our agency has a branch. The designer designed all of them the same way. Even though we could be visiting the agency in Hong Kong, we're still filming on our main set...maybe changing the colors a little bit. Bruheck's office sometimes doubles for a coroner's office. We just wheel in a slab. We just find locales that can double for other parts of the world. We can go to Grass Mountain, which can double for the Swiss Alps, and we can take a gondola up there."

Finally, the tongue-in-cheek wit, indelibly linked to the Bond franchise, has proven infectious within the series. "It's so funny and there is so much humor," said Meyer. "There is so much more than I anticipated. It's a very funny show. I think it's more cau-

#### DINA MEYER

**"What woman wouldn't be attracted to this role? My character's physically adept, strong, driven, smart, capable of doing just about anything. She's the kind of woman I wish I was."**



Meyer's SECRETS: "Everyone in Hollywood is so tickle. You could be making millions one day and then—a bad movie comes out—and you're like a disease."

edly than anything else. I love doing it. People have said in the past that I should be doing more of it. Sometimes we don't have a choice. Sometimes we're stuck doing 'hat' movies and 'bug' movies, but I love the comedy.

"The show is very physical. It's not that playing this character is so difficult, or the physicality is so difficult for me, but I've never been on a series before. I was on BEVERLY HILLS 90210 a couple of years ago, and did a couple of shows as a guest star, but that's not being one of the stars of a one-hour series. I had no idea the amount of time that actually went into filming a TV show. I can work 12 hours one day and 15 hours the next day. There was one episode where we had two 16-hour days in a row. I had 12 pages of dialogue a day, and then they gave us a new script. I had a 10-hour turnaround. I hadn't even

read the script for the following episode yet, and they wanted to bring me in early and I had another eight pages to learn for the following day. I never realized how challenging that week was. I never imagined the lack of time you have to do it all, with breaking down scripts and the actual memorization. I can finish a scene, and they can take ten minutes to light the next scene. By the time I walk back to my trailer, they're ready for me on the set. I got a lot of exercise between the set and my trailer, and never even had a chance to sit down. Then you finish one scene, and you're on to learning your lines for the next one. We shoot a show every eight days."

Meyer is speculating the producers may be throwing the audience a couple of curves. "It's a lighthearted action drama," advised the actress. "There's a lot of role reversal in this. I think

what people are going to expect from this show, they're not going to get. If they think it's a super slick James Bond guy who gets the girl in the end, it's not going to be that. It's very funny when Monk goes to open a door and it's locked, and he sort of gets out of the way so I can kick it down. He might be trying to smuggle secrets out of some country in a very James Bond, smooth kind of way. But I'll be kicking the ass of the enemy. I'll be the one who's suspended by my feet upside down 20 feet above the ground, trying to deflect the laser of a droid. Of course, the guys show up right after I've done it. I'll let myself down from the ceiling and I'll say, 'Perfect timing. I've taken care of everything but thanks for showing up.'"

Meyer performed her suspension scene in the "Breach" episode; cameras rolled, the crew nailed the shot and someone yelled, "Hey, that's back!" Suddenly, Meyer—dangling upside down—felt quite isolated. But as the distaff member of a male dominated cast, she had no complaints...

"It's great," she shrugged. "It's like going to work and being with your brothers. They're a host and we laugh a lot. Everybody has mood swings. I'd be lying if I said it's a glorious day every day. Everybody has a bad day, and we deal with whatever mood they might have. We're all supportive and 95% is wonderful..."

The agents endured terrorist, viruses and lethal technology, nevertheless, they couldn't survive beyond a fifth episode. Pulling the plug on SECRET AGENT MAN as a result of "low Nielsen ratings," UPN announced that the series' remaining episodes will be telecast later in the season. Though declining further fraternization with bugs and bats, Meyer is back on the big screen in D-TOX, a film noir thriller with Sylvester Stallone. □

# JENNIFER MORRISON URBAN LEGEND II

THE "STIR OF ECHOES" SPECTRE RETURNS TO THE GENRE & REVEALS ALL—EXCEPT THE PLOT.

BY PAUL WARDLE

December 2, 1998: Her arduous agenda notwithstanding, Jennifer Morrison looks pretty refreshed when we unite on set of *URBAN LEGEND 2: THE FINAL CUT*. The actress is cast as Amy Mayfield, a film student enrolled at Alpine University who's shooting a movie that documents a trail of urban legends. Naturally, chaos ensues and Mayfield's project is upstaged by very authentic murders. It's a physically taxing role which prompted Morrison's adherence to a daily workout regimen (i.e. exercising with a trainer "42 days out of a 46-day filming schedule").

"You don't always think [when you initially see the script], 'Am I going to be hanging off a ladder for eight hours?'" she laughs. "Some of the stuff can get really tedious, and the hours can get really long, but you keep yourself going by knowing that some really great scene is coming up."

The crew had just acclimated their own venue exclusively to night shoots.

Morrison appears very relaxed until queried about the film's script. Not unlike the sequel's forerunner, the cast and personnel are obligated to talk about anything but the plot. Morrison nervously laughs and digresses to "a few scenes in which I was drenched. I mean, absolutely drenched! I've fallen into water. It's not even like being rained on. It's being totally soaked wet and wearing wet jeans...ugh!"

"I have a ton of running in this movie, and I told them it's lucky I'm not a smoker! I work out. I run two or three miles every

other day, depending on my schedule. I have scenes where I'm jogging and others where I'm running to something or from something. They [the crew] say they get tired sometimes watching the dailies, because it's just hours of me running! [laughs]"

Appearing in plays all through her elementary education, Morrison recounts being fortunate enough "to have a couple of outstanding teachers in high school who were theatre performers and directors. They really were a driving force for me to stay with it." Graduating

*URBAN LEGEND 2: Morrison is speckled by a serial killer. "I have a ton of running in this film. The crew say they're tired of watching the dailies, it's hours of me running!"*



Morrison, as a student filmmaker, as Joseph Lawrence and Matthew Davis.

to college, Morrison—who still attends classes—applied for a major in Theatre. So how does she balance a fledgling acting career with her studies?

"It's hard to do," she admits. "I'm really good at changing things around when I have to. I started this semester in school, and I had a whole different load of classes. When I got this part, I had to go in and rearrange things so that the classes I was taking were ones I could do from a distance. I dispatched [homework] over the Internet. Thank goodness for the Internet. Basically, I have 12 hours of classes while I'm here. I did some work before I left to come out here, and some of it I'll finish when I get back and some of it I'm doing while I'm here. On my weekends, I write papers and read novels for my modern novel class and e-mail those in. It's such an important thing for me to graduate and I'm so close. School has always been an important part of my life."

Morrison, previously seen in *MIRACLE ON*





URBAN It's Jennifer Morrison's role, horror in Hollywood. "I look at a script and say, 'No woman would say any of this.' So I really want the strong, solo female.'

34TH STREET ('94) and INTERSECTION, made her genre debut in last year's *STIR OF ECHOES*, the underrated horror film, based upon a Richard Matheson novel, was eclipsed by *THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT* (both Summer 1999 films were released by the same film company). "I played the ghost—the creepy thing," notes the actress. "To watch that movie, and know that everybody's scared of me, is strange. I mean, it's just me [laughs]! I was murdered in the film, and you don't really find that out until later on when you get to the point of unveiling what this spirit is that's been haunting Kevin Bacon. He's driven mad, trying to figure out what this spirit is trying to communicate to him. I spent three hours in hair and makeup. My hair was dyed brown, I had extensions, they wanted me to look like I had been suffocated so my skin is pale and rounded out. I had dark eyes and cuts and bruises on my face."

URBAN & LEGEND "I exempted Morrison from

equally "intense" makeup until the film premieres, it's a tossup which of the supporting cast—including Joseph Lawrence, Eva Mendez, Jessica Cauffiel and Anthony Anderson—will require the stage blood and prosthetics. But Morrison did opt to perform many of her own stunts. "In one scene, I took a stumble and I've since had doctors in looking at my knees. It could have been a lot worse. I just basically have really swollen knees [laughs]."

Director John Ostrander re-

**44] was the ghost...the creepy thing in *STIR OF ECHOES*. They wanted me to look like I'd been suffocated. To watch it and know that audiences are scared of me is so strange. It's just me!"**

JENNIFER MORRISON

lates, "I worry a lot because Jennifer was doing that stunt where she wasn't supposed to fall but she did, and hurt her knees pretty badly. The schedule for that same night had her running through the forest and down an incline. She was still quite sore and I kept apologizing after every take."

The actress reveals that the injury could have been prevented if she hadn't declined an offer to wear kneepads. At the time, she didn't think the cushions were necessary. "And last night, I was doing some crazy stuff," she continues. "They wanted to harness me because I had to climb on all these things—I can't give too much away—but I had to jump from one thing to another, and they wanted a stunt person to do it. We were already in overtime and had been working all these hours, and I know I'd have this uncomfortable harness on."

"I know I could do the stunt. I'm a pretty athletic person and I knew I could do it. They kept telling me it

was too dangerous and I said, 'Just take the harness off! We'll get the shot so much faster than having to bring in a stunt woman.' So for a couple of hours last night, I was doing some stuff that—if I slipped and fell—I could've died. I kind of had to fight for it. They wanted to make sure I was safe and, as an actor, you have to appreciate that because stuff happens. When you're there doing it, you're so intense! And then, when I got done, I realized that if I fell, I would've died."

So does she concur with actresses—including this issue's centerfold—who insist there's a deficiency of "significant" roles for women? "I look at scripts and say, 'No woman would say any of this!'" Morrison explains. "We have a society that wants to see these strong male heroes. That's a really difficult thing for a woman to fight through. In the olden times, there was royalty for people to look up to, a magical fantasy world for them to dream about. And now what we give to people is the fantasy of the Hollywood world. It's a very difficult place for a woman. I feel really lucky with this role, because it's one of the few times that a 21-year-old girl is seen as an independent person. She's handling all these things. Not only is she a film student who's making her own films—in reality, there still aren't even a lot of female directors—but, at the same time, she's faced with all these challenges and she's dealing with them. I'm pulling guns on people, climbing around, trying to save people and trying to figure things out. She's defi-

URBAN 2 Intestines. Michael Russell, Tony Anderson, Morrison, Jessica Cauffiel & Eva Mendez in a sequel to a \$14 million pic that globally grossed nearly \$30 million



nately a strong person."

Nevertheless, Morrison volunteered to "correct" certain misconceptions, which drifted into **URBAN LEGEND 2**, regarding a woman's demeanor under stress. "When I first read the script," she sighs, "there were all these stage directions like, 'Amy falls apart sobbing.' It was all over the script. As a woman, you just know that you take on what you have to handle, and you push through and go on. Sometimes you're in shock over something horrible you've just seen, but you have to keep going. Then, when it's all over, you go home and that's when you cry."

Making some concessions—the script was often rewritten—the director afforded Morrison the liberty to hone her character's credibility. "I'm not going to do a take in a way I don't believe in," she says. "If that gets edited into the film, I have no control over that. No one looks at the movie and says, 'Oh, I bet the director told her to do that.' They would say, 'Why would she make that acting choice?' She's a bad actor!"

But producer Gina Matthews isn't worried: "Jennifer has a most amazing screen presence, and a sense of uniqueness in her performance. She was up for a lot of other movies, so we're lucky to have her. Her chemistry with [lead] Matt Davis is terrific. That's very important in choosing a cast chemistry!" □

**STAR OF HORROR** Kathryn Erbe is oblivious to Morrison's bathroom hauntings: "Three hours at makeup."



# URBAN LEGEND II THE FINAL CUT

## THE DIRECTOR AND PRODUCER ANALYZE SEQUELS, BOGEYMEN & BUDGET COMPROMISES.

BY PAUL WARDLE

When **URBAN LEGEND** was released in 1998, it turned out to be a sleeper hit for Sony Helming the inevitable sequel, John Ottman—making his debut as director—worked with a clean slate. New cast, new setting.

A USC graduate, Ottman had previously functioned as film editor and composer for both, **THE USUAL SUSPECTS** and **APT PUPIL**. He had also composed the soundtracks for a string of genre films, including **LAKE PLACID**, **HALLOWEEN H20** and the grim **SNOW WHITE** (97).

While supervising an "amusement ride" shoot in Ontario Place, located on Toronto's western waterfront, Ottman described his youthful **URBAN LEGEND 2: THE FINAL CUT** ensemble as "not at all jaded. Practically every actor has done their own stunt in this film, often insisting upon it. Nothing is beneath them."

So how did Ottman nail a directing gig? "Phoenix Pictures saw me build something from the ground up on **APT PUPIL**," he explains. "In a way, they saw me as a consummate filmmaker, and then I scored a movie for them called **LAKE PLACID**. Everyone has known for years that the reason I got into this mess in the first place was to direct. They whipped out a script and said, 'How about



**URBAN 2:** Jennifer O'Neill (**ROAD TRIP**) is a scary but scared Sandra. "There's lots of homage to classic films," says the director.

this?" At first, I said I couldn't do a horror film as my first movie, but I thought more about it, read the script and there was something different enough about this that maybe I could put my mark on it. And I was sort of a bargain because they knew me already, and I had a relationship with these people. They trusted me.

"I wanted **URBAN LEGEND 2** to be more of a thriller in nature, more Hitchcockian, as opposed to straight horror. I wanted to make it as intelligent as I could, while at the same time not alienating the audience that wants horror. I wanted to widen its appeal just enough where maybe some adults might get a kick out of it, too. There's a

lot of homages to classic films that will perhaps go over the heads of some of the younger viewers, but maybe the older audience members might get it."

One sequence that lampooned **AIRPORT 1975**, a disaster saga, was cut from the movie. During production of a film-within-a-film that's shot aboard a plane, "the actress is so intensely bad, that one of our characters yells at her, 'You're not Karen Black, for God's sake. You're not supposed to fly the plane, you're just supposed to scream! Nobody at the studio even got it!'"

The success of 1998's **URBAN LEGEND** notwithstanding, the producers deflected any pretense of a contriving a clone. "Actually the pressure was the opposite," says Ottman. "And now it's even more nerve-wracking. *Make this different from the first one, but don't ruin our franchise.*" In my view, the audience is either going to completely embrace it for being different, or completely reject it for being different. When Jim Currey decided to go against the grain and be a dark, weird character in **CABLE GUY**, it was at a time when they thought his fans were crying out for something different. But they rejected it."

"We were originally scouting out a typical Gothic university and I thought, 'Every movie is like this.' I thought we should do something completely different,



URBAN LEGEND 2: Jessica Cauffiel, Mount and Joe Mendez—who will survive? © Homage to John Carpenter's pioneering film? Actors celebrate on one of the Toronto sets: Mount, Joseph Lawrence, Cauffiel, Aaron Mount, Mendez.

and go to a contemporary, very modernistic university. I had to convince a couple of producers and sell them on the idea."

Only one thing was missing. "I'd written a tower into the script, a thing that we continually see and the whole climactic scene takes place in it. So we found a university, which was awesome, but it had no tower. We ended up building a tower on a structure, and it was a bit of a monstrosity of a hill with our budget."

As a result of the budgetary constructions, many scenes were dropped. Matter of fact, Ottman admits he "lucked out" with the Ontario Place locale—the site of our interview—which is one of the film's critical settings: "There was this big

showpiece scene, where you're in this bizarre amusement park ride. I had originally changed it to a kind of Santa's Village. We looked all over for a place. We knew we couldn't build it on a sound stage, which we had actually thought about doing, and then we found Ontario Place. It gives the film huge production values. It looks like we spent millions!"

Ottman has worked closely with the producers of URBAN LEGEND 2, one of whom is Gina Matthews, who was producer of the franchise's forerunner. "URBAN LEGEND made almost \$90 million worldwide?" says Matthews. "When I got approached about a sequel, I really did not want to do a rebash of the first movie. So

#### JOHN OTTMAN, DIRECTOR

**"I wanted it to be more of a thriller in nature, more Hitchcockian, as opposed to straight horror. I wanted to make it intelligent while not alienating the audience that wants horror."**

we just started meeting with writers. The writer of the first one was too busy and was unavailable to do it, so we listened to about 75 takes—between all the producers—and narrowed it down. A lot of times, sequels don't do as well as the original; we prefer taking the risk of doing something unique rather than betting that the same audience that came to the first movie will come to the second. We'd like to get new people in addition to that audience." Indeed, the only "leftovers" from the 1998 film are Loretta Devine (who played "Rose Wilson") and Rebecca Gayheart ("Brenda"), the latter performing a cameo.

Matthews is pragmatic about the flexibility of her budget limitations. "If the director has a set way he wants to shoot a scene, you say, 'Fine. You are going to

have to give up A, B and C. You're going to have to compromise, and not be able to shoot another scene at a particular location.' And you let him make the choice. Most of the time, you will find a happy medium. You may redesign the shot, choose another location or the director may decide to try it a different way."

"We knew John Ottman as an editor and a composer, so, ultimately, he knows what he's going to need. He walks to the set with such a command of his actors and his crew, because he knows what he's going to need when they go into the editing room. There was no doubt in my mind that he could do it and it's fun, as a producer, to be able to give people their first shot. That's how you discover new, fresh talent. I always prefer to go that route." □



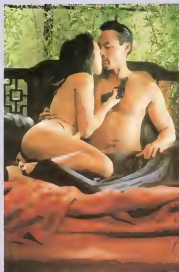
# Women: Stories of Passion

**DIRECTOR ADELE BERTEI-CHECCHI DISCUSSES CENSORSHIP, SCI-FI, SEXISM, FIRINGS & FIRINGS AND MALE VS. FEMALE LIBIDOS.**

BY DAN SCAFFEROTTI

A passion for music drew Cleveland, Ohio native Adele Bertei-Checchi to New York when she was 22 years old. Finding a berth in the music business as a singer and songwriter, she composed songs for the likes of Shazna Easton and the Pointer Sisters. "I really enjoyed music," said Bertei-Checchi. "It was my passion for a long time, but I was never able to find my voice as a singer-songwriter. I was good at writing songs for other people." An affection for film prompted her four-year enrollment in acting classes. She shifted to writing, and eventually collaborated with commercial and music video directors. A move to Los Angeles afforded her the liberty to exit from the music business and segue into writing film scripts.

A trailer for *THE BALAD OF JOHNNY JANE*, which Bertei-Checchi had directed, was aired during producer Elisa Rothstein's Cinewomen series. Rothstein, who was scouting for fledgling female directors to helm episodes of *WOMEN: STORIES OF PASSION*, was impressed.



Cecilia and Steve have in "The Lucky Bar," an episode of *WOMEN: STORIES OF PASSION* directed by Adele Bertei-Checchi, who also composed the music.

Bertei-Checchi came on board and directed four episodes of the cable series, produced by Showtime and Playboy. "And I wrote three of them," noted Bertei-Checchi. "City of Men" was my first complete narrative piece. As you know, the format of *WOMEN* is to explore the domain of women's fantasies in the erotica format. My story was a futuristic fantasy about a woman who imagines herself in a totalitarian world where men and women have been separated and live in separate cities. They're sequestered from each other and they get together, once a year, for a mating ritual. In the meantime, they send women pornographers into the city of men and vice versa to put each other on film so that they can have something to do in that waiting period before their mating ceremonies.

"So the story is about this woman's fantasy about being a pornographer and traveling to the city of men, with her female partner, to put men on film. It is illegal for them to make love with the men. She kind of takes a chance and nearly makes love with a blind man but they don't actually make





**Tab.** Gregory Norman Gray & Talia Botwin in "The Feather" episode, helmed by Bertie Chacchi. "The format of *WOMEN* is to explore the domain of women's femininity in the most direct. All the sexual needs are organic to the story."

love. It's all through language and hardly touching. It's a very libidinal fantasy. At the end of the fantasy, you realize that her female partner is actually her lover."

Surprisingly, the film provoked the censor of the studio brass: a lesbian kissing sequence had to be cut. "It was a bit provocative of a statement to make," said a still unnerved Bertie-Chacchi. "I'll never be sure whether it was Showtime or Playboy, but I was told that I would have to cut the kiss between the women at the end of the piece because it was too provocative for the viewership. I was quite shocked by it, but I sort of

**"I had to cut the kiss between the women, it was too provocative! They couldn't [comprehend] that women could be lovers and yet still eroticize about men."**

understand. I think it was too convoluted an idea for the powers-that-be to grasp. I don't think they could get behind the idea that women could be lovers, and yet still eroticize about men. There was something about it that didn't make sense to them. It's all about compromise, isn't it? You have to learn how to pick your battles, and I was very happy with the way it turned out. . .

"The greatest thing I can say about the *WOMEN* series is that it's so challenging to write a narrative piece that's a very cohesive story, yet has the requisite erotic beats in it to fulfill the producers' expectations. Writing a short story as a difficult little exercise. It translates to a half hour of film because the story has to be tight and it has to involve eroticism. I learned a lot, and felt I got a chance to sharpen some skills."

Her experience working as an assistant director, and developing a rapport with director Lizzie Borden, in-

fluenced Bertie-Chacchi with a comfort level that she applied to the technical aspects of directing. The challenge was supervising the actors within the inherently erotic scenarios. "The big double standard, which still goes on and is quite puzzling to me, is the fact that you can show a woman's whole body naked but there are still all these taboos about showing the male sex. I had a shot of a camera panning down a man's body and you saw his member but it was covered in rose petals—and they still made me cut that. So you can show full frontal nudity on a woman, but you still can't show it on a man. Although we were hitting for a more female audience, these are still predominantly viewed by men according to the people who do these kinds of tabulations. There must be some kind of fear among men of seeing the male member on screen. If you're with another man and you see it, maybe you shouldn't



be caught looking at it. I'm not sure."

Most of Bertel-Checchi's films are period pieces, including *"The Diamond Merchant,"* which is set in Tangier during the 1920s. A writer fantasizes that she is a daring diamond smuggler working out of a brothel: to move freely, she disguises herself as a male. "That was challenging because it was a period piece," said the director. "We had a lot of fun with it. My imagination seems to take those kinds of turns. Actually, there was a woman who lived in the 1890s named Isabel Eberhart who I was very fascinated by. She was attracted to the more secret side of Islam which is called Sufism. It was a religion that didn't include women, they were not allowed to study under the Sufi sect [much like what is going on in Algeria today]. She was attracted to this religion and she knew that the only way she would be able to penetrate into the society was to disguise herself as a man. She traveled in North Africa as an Arab man! She has a really fascinating story. I think that *The Diamond Merchant* probably spun out of my fascination with Isabel Eberhart."

The scale of the undertaking, shot on a low budget, proved problematic for the apprenticing director. Bertel-Checchi had to find a location that would look like Tangier. "We ended up working in a mausoleum in Compton that was built like a Moroccan palace," she recalled. "It was very beautiful and very decayed, and perfect for the piece."

As if requirements of costume, location and production design weren't enough of a tribulation, the actress cast in the most pivotal role was dismissed. "That's right, Elisa and I had to let the first actress go," Bertel-Checchi explained. "It wasn't even nu-



"The Lucky Bar" episode, directed by Bertel-Checchi. T. Jay Huguley and Deon Tuck assist-out. "This film non-Chinese gangster fantasy, which was fun to do." B. Huguley meets bandage Lisa Lisa Corbush (SHANDRA, THE JUNGLE GIRL, SLAVE PARS)."

dity, it was just had attitude. Consequently, we had to basically shoot the piece in four days rather than five days because we lost a day with the first actress. Basically, in the casting process, you prepare for that and have a backup. That was a very challenging show."

"The Lucky Bar," her only non-period piece, is a story of love, betrayal and revenge. A Chinese woman leans on a revenge fantasy about a woman with whom she had a had relationship. "In her fantasy, her father is a gangster," said Bertel-Checchi, "and she's involved with her father's business. This man comes back to do a business deal with her father and betrays her father and she, in turn, ends up killing him. It's kind of a film noir-Chinese gangster fantasy, which is also a lot of fun to do."

The Civil War was evoked in *"The Feather,"* a vignette written by Jocelyn Wright. A contemporary woman finds the diary of her great, great, great grandmother, unfolding a covertly sensual twist: left alone when her husband went off to war, the ancestor fell in love with a hunky Indian



who surfaced at her farm. She resisted their kindling passion and he leaves her with a memento of their liaison—a feather from his hair.

The fantasy format is far from dysfunctional in an anthology series that variably oscillates from eroticism to irony to burlesque. "During the first 'pitch' meeting, we had all these women sitting around a huge conference table pitching their erotic ideas," recounted Bertel-Chechi. "It was wild just to hear everyone's stories. I think the reason WOMEN is so different, basically, comes from the different personalities and wonderful imagination of all the people involved. I think with the RED SHOE DIARIES anthology there are only two or three writers and they are fairly consistent, thematically whereas WOMEN is 'anything goes.'"

"This isn't a put down to men," she said, "but I do think that women's libidos act in a different way than the usual male libido—or at least the way that it is projected in film. I think it has a lot more secret needs and errandies to it, and a lot more on the seductive parts of eroticism as opposed to the actual act. It's the whole 'build up,' which I think is more interesting to women than from what I've seen of the male eye. The romantic parts of the seduction are a lot more fascinating to women."

"For me, in terms of the four shows I've done, all of the sensual beads or erotic beads are initiated and organic to the story. So if it requires a little nudity, or if it requires a lot, that's what I have to deal with as well. In terms of dealing with the actors—in the casting process, the audition process—I'm very up front with them as to what I expect for each role, and how comfortable they will feel with it. An actor will not sign on before knowing exactly what's going to be entailed in terms of the erotic beads and action and requisite nudity.

**"The big double standard, which still goes on, is you can show a woman's whole body naked but there are still all these taboos about showing the male sex."**



WOMEN producer Elise Rothstein on the set of the Author. Author episode: "I wound up not only being the creator of the show—and the executive producer—but one of the recurring characters. Which was insane. Just utterly insane."

"There have been cases where I've had actors sign on and become incredibly self-conscious in front of a camera. That's quite difficult because it's a situation where you really have to work with an actor to get what you need out from them. I feel very uncomfortable about that, so I become even more rigorous in my casting process about what has to happen in the comfort level. If you get an actor who is just being very obstinate or uncomfortable about doing specific erotic beads, then you end up feeling like a perpetrator because you're trying to push them to do what you need them to do, and you've already discussed this in the casting time. It can be very difficult.

"Men are far more reluctant. It's like pulling teeth to get them to even show their behinds. Here are the women doing all the work. This is not exploitation, whatsoever, due to the fact that there are stories and the women who sign-on are doing it because they want

to do it and have no shame about their bodies in the context of the story. But what makes me laugh is to see these male actors on the set watching what the women do and their comfort level with it. But if you ask them to show a little of their behind, they just go crazy. They're very, very reluctant."

Wearing her writer's hat, Bertel-Chechi routinely requires one month to crank-out a script. "Stories tend to come fairly quickly, and then it's really breaking it down and working on the challenge of character arcs. Within a short format and story twists, you turn it into something engaging to an audience where things just continue to be revealed within that format, tied up with a good ending. It takes a bit of work."

Turning into the consummate auteur, Bertel-Chechi expanded her filmmaking experience by turning to her first love: "The wonderful thing about directing is that I can put every area of my

work through the years and my knowledge into it. The thing I love about filmmaking is that it's like a symphony. There's the visual elements, the emotional element of the story and the acting. There's also the musical elements. I wrote the music for several of the shows. I co-wrote the music for 'City of Men' and alone I wrote the music for 'The Lucky Bar.' I found that my training in music—I spent probably 15 years in the music world—contributed so much to my filmmaking because it is so much a musical medium in terms of rhythm and pacing, and nuance and lyricism. So it's the perfect medium for me. Whereas I might have been frustrated in music because I could never tell my stories in the context of a three-minute song, in film I feel like I can breathe and tell my stories and it's all the things I could imagine: the visual aspects, the musical aspects, and the emotional aspects and I can get them all in. It has become my passion. It's a way to incorporate all my creativity in a wonderful way."

Her feature for Mystique Films is a comedy called SECRETS OF A CHAMBERMAID, which will debut to video in both an unrated and an R-rated version. Mary McCormack, one of WOMEN's ensemble of female directors, plays Felicity, a wealthy woman living in an old Victorian mansion. Four guests are invited to the reading of her will but a postponement imposes upon them to remain at the villa for the weekend. "The house is an amazing place called the House of the Mermaids," said Bertel-Chechi. "It's got these incredible seaside motifs all over the house. You walk up to the house and there are these two mermaids in frosted glass with the word 'sin' emblazoned in the glass. The house plays a character in the film and the quartet begin to experience new areas of their sexuality." □

# Mary Woronov Director of Passion

THE ACTRESS-TURNED-DIRECTOR ON VAMPIRES, LOW BUDGETS, EROTICISM, MALE VS. FEMALE NUDITY AND STARVING ACTORS.

BY DAN SCAPPEROTTI

A Renaissance woman, she declines to swim mainstream. Mary Woronov opts for roles in eclectic, independently-produced films. And some—including HOLLYWOOD BOULEVARD, RATING RAOUL, DEATH RACE 2000 and ROCK 'N' ROLL HIGH SCHOOL—have turned into bona fide cult classics. Between films, Woronov applied herself to other crafts, including writing and painting. Moonlighting as one of Hollywood's few female directors, she crossed over into another medium: directing. Woronov was engaged to helm a quartet of episodes for WOMEN STORIES OF PASSION, Showtime's erotic cable series. Snake and Swimming Underground, two books written by Woronov, prompted a meeting with Eliza Rothstein, the series' executive producer. "The Red Dress," a script submitted by Woronov, had been approved for production but it was incumbent upon the actress/director to star in the episode.

"No. I'm too old to do nudity," Woronov told the TV person-

nel. But Rothstein offered her a deal she couldn't refuse: if she compromised, Woronov could direct her next script. "The Red Dress" teleplay was about this woman who has a



Fonda Dublin in "Seduced Love," an episode of WOMEN STORIES OF PASSION. It was adapted from a story that Woronov had written for a book entitled Wake for the Angels.

lot of lovers," said Woronov. "They really wanted me to do it. They thought an older woman would be so wonderful because the character was so sexy." But the film was never unspooled beyond the cutting room. "I think that's because I shouldn't have been in it," insists Woronov. "I don't think the part really called for a victim and I don't look like a victim. The character constantly gets put on by people who want to have sex with her every time she puts this red dress on, and that calls for a girl who looks like a victim, a girl who can't say No." But I look like I can say No! a lot. I thought it didn't work because of that, but they said it was wonderful. It was one of their first ones and the directing wasn't good enough, and they didn't put enough sex in it so it never hit the screen."

Nevertheless, Rothstein purchased Woronov's next script and afforded the actress/writer an opportunity to direct its adaptation. Woronov eventually helmed three of her own episode screenplays: "The Little Vampire," "The Gargoyle" and "Blind Love."

Woronov was also hired to direct "Astral Eros," an episode that she didn't write. The plot: when Marguerite's husband leaves for Madrid on a business trip, she launches into a "strange in-



Woronov as sedate Dr. Fletcher in *HELLHOUSE* (1969). "When I was younger, I was much more comfortable with low budgets. I remember bringing a towel to the sets and pretending I was asleep so I didn't have to talk to anyone."

alism" with upstairs boarder Claudia. Suddenly, Marguerite finds herself commuting to the astral plane where she realizes that Claudia is a menace to her marriage. "That was interesting," said Woronov. "It's not something I would ever write. It was kind of a weird 'space thing.' I didn't like the way the set was decorated, so I just brought in all my paintings and hung them around. So I'm kind of fond of it."

"Blind Love" was based on a short story that Woronov had written for a book called *Wife for the Angels*. "It's about a girl who was cautious about falling in love. A guy starts calling her and she has phone sex with him. They want to see each other, but they don't want to break the mysteriousness of not seeing each other. So

they go to a hotel and make love wearing blindfolds. She finds out that he hasn't kept his blindfold on at all and, as a matter of fact, he works right around the corner from her and she gets terribly mad and runs away. In the original story, it's not a happy ending but in the movie, of course—in the little thing for *Playboy*—it's very happy. She has these girlfriends who are saying she was wrong. In the book, the guy was really ugly and that's why he wanted to have blindfolds, but, in the movie, you can't have an ugly guy having sex so the guy's very handsome."

Woronov's personal favorite is "The Little Vampire," which features Shannan LeMaster as Angelica. Bitten by a blood parasite, she inhabits an abandoned house. After applying "the

**"I bring a unique perspective to erotic films. Men are very visual, they just need the old grind to be interested. But that's not enough for women, who want story."**

bite" to a young man searching for his dog, an unconventional relationship blossoms. He begs Angelica to continue to draw blood from his jugular, but she prefers to avoid the risk of draining (i.e. killing) the gentleman. She's constantly taunted by the "master vampire," who's trying to manipulate her complete deflection from humanity.

"I have an affinity for fantasy," said Woronov. "I've written a script called *VAMPIRE CULT QUEENS*, which is really funny. I'm friends with Barbara Steele and Martine Beswick, and I thought, 'Wouldn't it be great if there was a movie just with the three of us?' So I wrote a movie for just the three of us, about how we were cult queens but we

were actually vampires. You know, they're on the cult queen circuit and they're signing autographs. This one fan really annoys Mary—my character—and she ends up biting him on the neck. Their manager is also a 'master vampire,' and he forbids them from doing any fresh kills because it brings bad publicity. So when she ends up biting the fan, they have to run away from their manager. They take this fan with them and they feed off him. Mary is very disgruntled, she really doesn't want to be a vampire because she doesn't want to live forever. In the end, she falls in love with this fan. He, on the other hand, becomes arrogant and they have to get rid of him. In the end, Mary's the last vampire, knowing she's a dying race, she befriends these two other vampires. We're looking for money right now to do the movie."

"So I was into vampires

and I wrote *The Little Vampire*," which is a very sweet sort of thing. It's about a girl who doesn't want to be a vampire and she doesn't want to kiss this guy. When she kisses a guy, or they make love, he becomes addicted to her. He can't get enough of her and she keeps saying, "No. No. You're going to die if I keep this up" and he says, "Do it again." There's a master vampire in that one who wants her to kill the guy. She goes against the master vampire and says, "Screw you" and walks out into the sun. What happens? Nothing. She's fine. It's a metaphor. If you're always closed in, a dark power rules you, if you do walk out into the sun, you find out that it was all just a myth."

Woronov's script for "The Gigolo" hybridized kink and comedy. The central character

Horatio Anthony and Shannan LeMaster in "The Little Vampire" episode, Woronov's personal favorite.



ter, Laura, literally "needs to be frightened into sex" and hires Nick to fulfill her desires. Unfortunately, she becomes addicted to Nick, who's eventually reluctant to play her games. "It's very funny," and Wornow "Laura's a hard case. She and Nick have this weird sex. Secretly, he has fallen in love with her. He laughs at her and says, 'Just be a woman and like me.' But she doesn't. She's very hard-core. She tries other people and, finally, she comes back to him. He tells her, 'You know you've been writing the script every time we make love. I'm going to write the script now.' He suggests that they have this fake marriage, and he tricks her into really marrying him, and she likes it."

While erotic filmmaking has been almost exclusively the province of men, Wornow and other female directors are rejuvenating the genre: "I know, as a woman, I bring a different perspective because my idea of 'porno' is different. Men, I believe, are very visual. They just need the old grind, really, to be interested. I don't think that's enough for women...they could do with very little grind. What they need is a story, a narrative thread, to make them interested. It could be a stupid narrative thread—it doesn't have to be ingenious or fabulous—it just has to be that thing that keeps them wanting. It's a different kind of sexuality. Men are different, men are very visual and I think women need more story."

Past experiences have served Wornow well on her fast-paced TV tenure. "I adapted very well to the schedule," she said, "because I'm used to doing very shitty movies. I've done the lowest budget movies in the world. EATING RAOUL was done in 28 days, but it took them a year to shoot it because they had no money [Director Paul Bartel] would call us up every three months and say, 'Let's shoot two days.' We never had any

**"I adapted well to the schedule because I'm used to doing very shitty movies. I've done the lowest budget movies in the world! I mean, this was like big time."**



T. Keele Dobbin in "Wind Lover," an episode that compromised Wornow's short story ("Mike was not a happy ending but it's very happy in the Playboy film"). Nevertheless, Wornow directed (above, with actors Dobbin and Cheryl Berio).



money and we never had any time, and we never had any food. We never had anything. So WOMEN was like big time. I've been on bigger movies, too, but I do very well with rushed low budget stuff. That's why I really want to do VAMPIRE CULT QUEENS. It's a low budget, I'd do it myself."

While performing sans wardrobe hasn't been a problem for Wornow as an actress, she is cognizant—as a director—that similar obligations draw mixed reviews from her casts. "Nudity isn't difficult for me because I've been nude a lot in most of my roles. It's fine with me, because I have a good looking body so why should I care? But some people do care. I found that usually, when I get with the girls on the set, they think, 'Well she's that way so I guess I don't have to worry. I'll be that way too.' I've never had a problem with the women. But I find men to be very shy. Women are constantly asked to show their bodies, so they've either made that decision, 'Hey, I'll show my body. I'm cool with it' or 'I don't show my body and I shouldn't be here, so don't hire me.' Men are much, much different because they haven't had to come across that decision. The people don't run around asking men to take off their clothes. But they're beginning to. So the men are shy and a lot of them ask me, 'What if I got an erection?' and I just laugh and tell them they're not going to. I tell them, 'Don't worry, there's nothing sexy about that and I say, 'Please don't worry. I guarantee it's not going to happen.' They don't know if they should show themselves. They're fine with the lovemaking, they're really good at that."

"But we have a problem. We're not allowed to show them. No dick whatsoever. So I'm constantly shooting around it. Everybody's very cool about it. Every man renders about it and nobody talks about it. Nothing

is ever mentioned about *them* and sexuality, where with women it's constantly discussed. Is this moral? Is this right? Is she a whore if she shows her tits? Is her boyfriend going to complain? Guys come to the set and who are they going to ask? They don't want to offend anybody. It's very interesting."

In regard to directing sex scenes for the cable series, initially Woronov pondered, "How do you tell someone, 'I want you to look like you're going down on this person'? What I finally did was I had this great A.D. [Assistant Director]. She was a girl and I would say, 'Okay do this' and I would do it to the A.D. and then they would do it. It was hysterical. The crew would just watch me like, 'Where is this woman from? Show someone and it's much better than a lot of words.'"

Upon talking behind-the-scenes experience, Woronov has shifted her priorities: "I don't think I'd like to act anymore. Once you get the taste of control, you get a vision and, all of a sudden, doing someone else's vision is not really appetizing to you. As an actor, you come



T&A: Aurélien Scott & Nick Kokonas in "The Glee," Woronov's "most comedic" WOMEN episode. Woronov's goal is to adapt her song, *WAMPYRE CULT QUEENS*—a vehicle for herself, Marlene Duvall and Barbara Steele—into a movie.

in and they tell you what to do, what to wear, what to say. I'm a little too creative. I love writing but someone will take your writing and then they'll do the wrong thing to it. So I really don't like to write unless I direct. Directing is a wonderful thing because it's like having children. People come to you with their ideas and you

say, 'Yeah, great'—or 'No, that doesn't help me.' And then you have the big vision. Usually, people understand and they come up with great ideas, things that I couldn't think of, and yet they help the project and I love that."

Exempting a few actors—Marla Coughlin Alonso, Sally Kirkland and Kathy

Shower—the series' actresses are heretics of celebrity. "The reason you haven't seen anybody," Woronov explained, "is because most of these people are new, and because they're new they can't get work and so they do this. Being an actor these days is not a pretty thing. There are like 16 people and they make all of the

money. The rest of us only make scale and work is very, very scarce now because they only use leads. Everybody is starving in the acting world, it's not a great place to be. They're good actors but can't get jobs because everybody wants name people. Our actresses were good but they should be doing big work."

# Valerie Landsburg Director of Passion

A FORMER "FAME" REGULAR-TURNED-DIRECTOR—WHO HAS "NO DISCOMFORT WITH NUDITY & SEX"—MAY CRACK THE BOYS CLUB.

By DAN SCAPPEROTT

During a 20-year tenure, Valerie Landsburg hit the boards as an actress. One of her first gigs was as "Frannie" in *THANK GOD IT'S FRIDAY*, a 1978 release that tapped into disco fever: the supporting players included neophyte film actors Debra Winger and Jeff Goldblum. In *WELCOME HOME ROXY CARMICHAEL* ('80), a Winona Ryder vehicle, Landsburg played "Miss Day Ashburn." Her recurrent TV roles include "Cheryl Dolan" on *HOTEL* and easygoing, versatile Doris Schwartz on *FAME*. Landsburg directed episodes of the latter series and one of them, "Reflections," earned an Emmy for Best Editing.

Landsburg has been bi-coastal since childhood, bouncing from Los Angeles to New York. During her spare time, she writes teleplays. Film direction, however, is her primary focus. "I started directing before my first kid was born, and started again after my second kid," says Landsburg. "I now have three. I actually enjoy writing but I like directing the best."

Radio host Judy Shear met Elisa Rothstein, creator/executive producer of *PLAYBOY SHOWTIME'S WOMEN STORIES OF*



Kate Hodger and Richard Young in Landsburg's "Whirl Thinking" episode. "They handled that one to me at the last minute. I wanted to make it a corpse in color and texture. I wanted to see how close we could get to a cartoon & still maintain real life."

*PASSION*, at Cinewomen Shear subsequently enlightened Landsburg that Rothstein was hiring female directors for the cable-TV series. "I put together all the tape I'd done," said Landsburg, "including a little music video, a few episodes of *FAME* and a few episodes of *TRUE CONFESSIONS*, a series similar to *WOMEN*." By the time Landsburg was personally introduced to Rothstein, the roster was al-

most full. Only a single episode remained to be tagged with a director and a certain actress was competing for that same assignment. "Uma Thurman had expressed a desire to start directing," said Landsburg, "so I left basically knowing that if Uma didn't want to start directing, I had a job. About three weeks later, Elisa called and asked if I wanted to come and work with her."

The episode offered to Landsburg was the ninth in the series, but there was more in the pipeline for the fledgling director. Much more. "They asked me if I could hump my episode up because they had a week with a Martin Luther King Day in it, and it was going to shorten the work week. They said that I would have to shoot my episode in four days instead of five. Being the insecure actor that I was, I said, 'Sure!' Meanwhile, I hadn't shot a frame of film in like nine years. Then they had a director drop out, and they called and asked me if I could prep an episode. By this time, they had been picked up for a back 13 episodes. I told them if I'm going to shift all of this around, and it meant giving up a trip I was going on, I wanted another episode.

So without shooting any of them, I went from shooting one to shooting three...

"Then in the middle of my first one, things fell apart with one so they lost another episode. I pitched one and Elisa bought it. Now I was doing four. They had another one where the script didn't develop the way they thought it would, so they said, 'Do you remember one you had pitched for the back 13? Can you write





**"I'm sorry for actresses who have their breasts augmented because they think it'll get them work. I prefer natural, real...I like the look of smaller breasts."**

Sweet," one of her favorite episodes. Beth Broderick was cast as a woman who's lived in Paris for ten years and makes a trip to the States to attend her best friend's birthday. Strolling along the beach, she meets an 18-year-old boy and both polish-off a bottle of champagne. "They make out on the beach," Landshurg noted. "She wakes up the next morning only to discover that he's the young son of her best friend, who she hadn't recognized because she hadn't seen him since he was ten years old. Later, he shows up at her house and tells her, 'I want you.' She says, 'This is crazy. You're my friend's kid.' Finally, he writes her a love letter and tells her he's been in love with her since he was little. He's a virgin and he wants to be with her. She finally gives in and tells him, 'Okay. I'm leaving for Paris. I'm going back home and you can come and spend one night with me.' They spend the night together."

"I love older women, younger men stories. It's a dynamic that I think is very interesting. To my taste it's more interesting than older men, younger women. My mother, Sally Landshurg, actually wrote an interesting book on it called *The Age Taboo*. She's in a relationship with somebody who's 15 years younger and they've been together for 20 years."

Based upon Landshurg's script, "Father and Son" is an episode "that looks like Impressionist paintings. We got licensed to use a number of Impressionist paintings. Throughout the episode you dissolve in and out of various famous paintings. I set the whole tone, the palette

and the look to go along with that kind of color temperature and palette. It was a million degrees when we were shooting that. We were at a beautiful warehouse downtown, the Pan Pacific."

During the filming of Landshurg's first episode, she pitched the story for "Hot Trick" to Rothstein. The concept involved a writer who's typing as her stories are visualized on screen. The premise eventually materializes into a chronicle about a woman whose sexual fantasies—which prompt an odyssey to Texas, New York and restoration drama—rescue her marriage. Landshurg cast friends Leslie Sachs and Rick Negron in the husband and wife roles. "They're fabulous actors," she said, "and I knew they were a couple, so I asked them if they'd like to come and work as a

"Women produced and directed." Colleen McDermott & Tony Brooks (the scene producer's spouse) in Landshurg's first episode, "Warm Hands, Cold Feet."

it this week?" I was actually doing a rewrite for another movie but I said, 'Sure!' and I came back with a script. Originally, I couldn't direct the one I was writing because I was going to direct another one for Elisa. Then the schedules kept changing so I ended up directing six of them in the first season. I did nine altogether."

The first episode that Landshurg directed, "Warm Hands, Cold Feet," starred Rothstein's husband, Tony Erochka. "I've done two with her husband," Landshurg smiled. "In the two years that we did these, I told Elisa that I saw her husband naked more often than she did. It was interesting working with predominantly women. We had women as producers, writers and directors and men as A.D.s and D.P.s—a great

mix."

Another of her episodes, "Motel Magic," starred Sally Kirkland and Gabriella Hall. "When I first read it, I thought that Sally should do this," said Landshurg. "I didn't know her, so I called my friend Kevin Spacey and asked if he knew Sally. Kevin gave me her number and I called her up and we met for coffee. I knew a lot of people think she's real tough, but I find her delicious and we had a blast together. She's a wonderful actress and she's not scared of anything. The production designer on that is Douglas D. Smith. He built those hotel rooms with the dissolving walls. He built those from scratch. His budget in the art department was only \$2,500. He's a genius."

Landshurg wrote and directed "The Bitter and the

Landshurg helms the "Author, Author" episode. "More men are still giving women opportunities to do big films."



twosomes. That was fun because you had two people who weren't afraid to be together. You didn't have to be so careful with the erotic content."

Landshurg developed a unique visual mode for each of the episode's vignettes: "We had touched on three genres. For 'white trash' Texas, we shot like two steps too far open, blown out. We let New York get a little gritty and over-saturated with color. I wanted to shoot it in black and white, but we had to deliver in color. As long as it had to be color, what I did was literally light the set very theatrically; hence, actors move through shafts of different colored light. I used color more stylistically. In the last piece, it's all restoration. This is the genius of Doug Smith. When I see it, it's like a Visconti. We went to the Parkview Hotel and built this restoration set, which all had to be leaped later. We subsequently found out we got such a good deal at the Parkview because it was Cince de Mayo and, across the street, there were 25,000 people in the park playing mariachi music. So I had to literally leap every inch of the film.

"The Texas one is about a young girl who meets the cutest guy in her high school. He picks her up in his truck one day after his fiancée has just dumped



Kristine Kiesa in Landshurg's "Luck Be A Lady" episode: "We used heavy diffusion, I wanted it to look like 1990 Playboy and that's the kind of color texture that's there."

him. She takes this one opportunity to have him. The second piece has absolutely no dialogue. Two people meet at a New York loft party. The girl goes to the bathroom and the guy follows her. They start to make love in the bathroom and people are pounding on the door. He drags her out into the

hallway and they make love in a stairwell. It's a completely visual piece. The restoration story concerns a man who has been charged with the care of his brother's wife while he is away at war. He's madly in love with her but he can't touch her. There's a sequence with him laying on the bed talking to

her as this young valet begins to pleasure her."

In the series' economy chapter, "Back in the Garden," Elisa Rothstein introducing clips from other shows. The episode's credits crawl identifies Carrington Stark as director, but it was Landshurg calling the shots. "At the time I was using a pseudonym, Carrington Stark, but that was before I ended up resigning from the Directors Guild of America. I resigned because, after the series, I was going to have the opportunity to do another movie and they hustled me for doing the movie. They fined me rather heavily and, unfortunately, no contract could be made for the piece because it was television—and there is no low-budget television contract with DGA. I'm a member of four unions and I'm very disillusioned with them, and have been at the wrong end of a lot of things that have gone down with unions for one reason or another. So we created this character, pretending that Carrington Stark was this English director. She became this character who talks off-stage (offering a British accent). It was funny because they used six episode clips for that show, three of which were mine."

"Trio" related the story of a female cellist who has an affair with her downstairs neighbor and his girlfriend,

Diana Miravet, Ginger-Justin & Clay Greenback on the "Trio." Landshurg's script is semi-embroiderical, searching his days in a New York brownstone. "I had a downstairs neighbor who I had a relationship with. We were friends. He brought a woman into his life. I had a relationship with him and this woman."



another musician who plays for the New York Philharmonic. Landsburg integrated her own past into the teleplay: back in 1979, she was working on Broadway and living in a brownstone on 96th Street in New York. "I had a downstairs neighbor who I ended up having a relationship with," she recalled. "We had been friends for the longest time, and he finally brought a woman into his life. I ended up having a relationship for about six weeks with him and this woman. That became the basis for 'Trio.' There are things that are changed in the movie but it was a wonderful experience. It's an enormous amount of story packed into 24 minutes."

"Luck Be a Lady," shot for the 1998 season, is a period piece that transpires in Nevada, circa 1957. A contemporary cocktail waitress (Kirstina Kelse) dreams about the glory days of Las Vegas. She convinces herself as Eva, the moll of gangster Joey "The Fish" Petroselli, who's secretly in love with a would-be singer. Again, production designer Douglas D. Smith created the impressive sets. "We filmed that in a drug bar called the Queen Mary in L.A., which we redressed," said Landsburg. "Douglas suggested, 'Instead of shooting at a hotel, why don't we do a ONE FROM THE HEART and build it on a stage?' So he built me a hotel room, built me an exterior and we got one or two old cars."

"We sort of blew the neon across the screen as a transitional piece. Again, we used heavy diffusion, heavy saturation. I wanted the whole thing to look like a 1955 Playboy. That's the kind of color texture that's there. So everything on the set is turquoise and pink and red and it's all painted. When you have no money, you create a hotel room that has got like these incredibly vibrant colors in them. You're not going to be able to light it because you only have so much of a lighting package."

**"A female influence is slowly happening. Producers in Hollywood—and that includes female producers—haven't opened their arms to female directors yet."**



Scott Ellis Loring turns Kate Rediger's "Wishful Thinking" into reality. "It was fun," says Landsburg, whose influence for the film was Almodóvar.

The "Wishful Thinking" episode is fueled by a genie, a genre icon that has recurrently surfaced on TV (THE X FILES) and film. Only two weeks before her wedding, Kalli (played by Kate Rediger) is sick of latex, condoms and the debilitating reality that she'll be sleeping the rest of her life, with the same guy. A genie appears, offering her carte blanche sexual liberty: during the next 24 hours, no one will refuse her and no one will remember the next day. "They sort of handed that one to me at the last minute," said Landsburg. "I'm a fan of Pedro Almodóvar, who did WOMEN ON THE VERGE OF A NERVOUS BREAKDOWN. I wanted to make it almost a cartoon in color and in texture, and see how close we could get to a cartoon and still maintain real life. It's one of my earliest ones in the series so it's a little inconsistent for me. I think we left Carrington Stark on that one."

It turns out that the series' erotic streak clicked

with Landsburg's own liberality: "My friends all laugh because they think it's so perfect that I ended up doing this. I sort of have this wild reputation among my friends. I have no discomfort at all with nudity and sex. I am one of those people who believes anybody can do whatever they want, if they're not physically hurting another person."

"When shooting lovemaking or nude scenes, I don't turn on the camera and say, 'Okay you guys, make love.' I always explain to them, up front, that I'm going to do a lot of coverage. For me, there's a line between erotic stuff and porn. There are a couple of dividing lines for porn for me. I like lots of big masters. If everything is shot in a non-moving master, it tends to look flatter and more like porn. I cover a lot and I move the camera a lot. I like to use their bodies as pieces of art, staying away from the [sex] act itself by breaking it up and focusing on the beautiful part of this hand or that breast. I'm also a big

voyeur. I'm the sort of person who, if someone is kissing in the street, will always stop and watch them. I only direct what I think is sexy. I don't direct what I think other people are going to think is sexy. I direct what turns me on. At times, it's sensuality and passion; at times, it's sensuality born out of love. Then there's sensuality born out of desire, and it may have nothing to do with love. It's born out of great need."

While acting credibility is critical in Landsburg's casting sessions, she is similarly impressed with the "physically natural look" of the applicants: "I like when people's bodies are real. One of my favorite things about 'Trio' is everybody is very real looking. I feel sorry for actresses who have their breasts augmented because they think it will get them more work. I'm disturbed when I see a woman who has fake breasts that are really out of proportion to her body. I found that a lot of those are not necessarily what they wanted. We were laughing about my episodes because I was the Queen of the A-Cup Club. I prefer natural over anything, but I do prefer the look of smaller breasts. I like a little tuck and small breasts. I like a little belly, which I didn't get to use much because I'm dealing with a distributor who wants a hard body. I love the Marilyn Monroe body. I never met bedou— I left that up to the executives."

But Landsburg still regards female directors as pioneers: "It's happening, but very slowly. The good news is that Mira Nair directed PEACEMAKER, a big studio action picture. And there's Penny Marshall and Betty Thomas from PRIVATE PARTS. Producers in Hollywood haven't really opened their arms to women directors yet. And I'll tell you something else, women producers haven't either. More men are still given more opportunities to do big films."



## FATALE ATTRACTIONS

continues from page 4

Upon completing his portfolio of "Barbaric"—i.e., illustrations of sword-wielding barbarian queens & female warriors—artist Stephen F. Ventres conceptualized a female fantasy figure, which he christened Angelina. "Sarcasm of Light" The inspiration literally "took shape" as a crumpled 10 1/2" resin sculpture. "We were looking around ideas of what would make a neat model kit," said Ventres. "We wanted something different, something everyone else hasn't done. I don't think anyone has done a good concrete. I had the idea for a pair of goodbad sorceress bookend kits. Angelina was developed as the good sorceress."

Ventres drew upon a confection of light, darkness, fire and ice for his sculpture. "Yielding to research, he integrated actual witchcraft incantations into the base of the 'limited edition' model kit. 'These symbols are carved around the cauldron,'" Ventres explained. "The symbol for Angelina is the witch's symbol for sunlight."

Ventres trained at trade show exhibits and workshop demonstrations, fabricating models of machinery and the figures. "I have a strong engineering

drifting background, and that can't help but show up in my artwork."

Angelina's sister kit will be Seranya, Princess of Darkness. "Angelina is the good girl, Seranya is not," clarifies Ventres. "That scrubbed clean, blonde, virginal theme that goes along with Angelina will be just the opposite for Seranya." While a young dancer named Gina posed as Seranya, Angelina was a composite. "I used a combination of our dancers," explained Ventres, who manages an agency for exotic dancers. "It was whoever happened to be the least busy when I needed them for various music structures. I'll never do that to myself, again. The chest of blending the features of four or five females together, to create one natural looking female, was a challenge. I made it a lot harder on myself than I needed to."

Ventres' elaborate Angelina kit includes technology that simulates a pulsating flame within the cauldron. "The boiling water has an electronic lighting kit that randomly flickers red and orange. I'd like to maintain the theme so the Seranya kit will also have the clear resin and powder parts and electronics." For further details, write **Stephen F. Ventres, 2040 North Elston, Chicago, Illinois—00614** □

B: Ventres poses for fantasy illustrator Stephen Ventres. Among their alliances is a serpent rendering (C). Ventres has applied his art to business tables as well.









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